THE ORIGINS, BUILDING, AND IMPACT OF A SOCIAL WELFARE STATE IN LATE COLONIAL SINGAPORE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

HISTORY

DECEMBER 2016

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Keywords: colonial policy, decolonization, Singapore, social welfare, state-building

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The doctoral dissertation is essentially a solitary enterprise, moreover for reasons and goals that can be characterized as egoistical. It is therefore easy to forget, long after earning the Ph.D., that the privilege of having the opportunity to earn the degree is dependent on the kindness and generosity of others.

For his reassuring support, incisive advice, and an inspiring determination to be better and simply to know more, I am deeply grateful to Leonard Andaya. I am also extremely appreciative of the considerable intellectual and personal support given by Peter Hoffenberg, Michael Aung-Thwin, Liam Kelley, Barbara Andaya, Guo Jing, and the late Jerry Bentley. My deepest gratitude goes to Susan Carlson, who kept an encouraging look-out for an international student several thousand miles away. Heartfelt and the warmest of thanks go to Jenna Wilton, Melissa Esmacher, Adam Witten, Josh Hevert, Jeffery Oshiro, Marcus Ferrara, and Alice Terry for friendships that eased the worries of a stranger and made him feel welcomed.

I am deeply grateful for the research support provided by the Lee Kong Chian Research Fellowship, National Library of Singapore. Portions of this study, particularly Singapore's social security developments, are direct results of the research fellowship. I am grateful to the Ministry of Social and Family Development and the School of Oriental and African Studies Library for allowing access to its archival records, the Asia Research Institute for facilitating access to research materials, and to Tim Yap Fuan from the National University of Singapore's Central Library for procuring archival records from overseas archives. There are simply not enough 'Thank You's for the archivists of the National Archives of Singapore, particularly Gayathri Gill and Kevin Khoo, for their time, patience, and generous assistance in facilitating access to archival records. Special thanks to Larry J. Butler for extremely helpful book recommendations, to Chua Mui Hoong for publicizing my research in *The Straits Times*, and especially to Ann Elizabeth Wee for her time and chats, and the opportunity to work with her on Singapore's social welfare history. I must also acknowledge the profound impact my colleagues from the Social Support Division of the former Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports had on me. This study is one result of a short but extremely fulfilling two years there.

My application to the doctoral program was supported by Maitrii Aung-Thwin and Tim Barnard. I am especially grateful to Maitrii as well as Mr. Kwa Chong Guan for their steadfast support over the years, their generosity in giving their time and providing opportunities to engage, expand and further my research interests. I must also acknowledge and thank, for their invaluable friendship and unreserved support, Sarah Ismail, Zakir Hussain, Chew Yong Jack, Pang Yang Huei, Panu Wongcha-um, Kelly Lau, Sandra Lau, Mok Meifeng, Hu Wen and Tony Tan.

There are no words or deeds that will adequately express my profound gratitude to my family. I am forever indebted to my best friend and wife, Ashanti Devi; and to my parents, Dorothy Chia Meng Ngoh and Richard Ho Yuen Woi. The completion of this work is impossible without their unconditional support and love.

ABSTRACT

This study asks two broad questions: How did state and society in colonial Singapore respond to the social needs of a human life over time, at birth, youth and adulthood, during illness, injury and unemployment, and finally old age, retirement and death? What kind of state eventually emerged to address those needs? Addressing those questions, this study offers an augmented understanding of state-building via a colonial policy that created a social welfare state in late colonial Singapore. The state is more than a series of institutions, bureaucracies, and policies erected for the purposes of administering a territory and its peoples. The state is also the result of historical processes and experiences arising from individual decisions and actions. The social welfare state here refers to the institutions, structures, processes, and the individuals working within to effect social welfare. Arising from a mix of metropolitan and global factors, social welfare was part of a new imperial policy after the Second World War to create cohesive communities out of plural societies that would eventually be self-governing, and ideally join the British commonwealth of nations. The history presented is a local one as the introduction and implementation of social welfare in postwar Singapore were complicated by local circumstances, namely the unpredictable responses of a colonial society unfamiliar with a deliberate state presence in social welfare and the challenges of decolonization. This study puts at the forefront the migrant worker, the colonial administrator, the concerned volunteer, the social welfare officer, the social worker, and the people they helped. Their lives and experiences gave meaning and coherency to the social welfare state that emerged in late colonial Singapore. Each individual moreover experienced colonialism differently and vividly, making it more than an ordinary period of time in Singapore's past. Colonialism's varied legacies on Singapore have yet to be fully appreciated, especially those affecting social policy, state-societal relations, nation-building, and historical research. This study is an attempt at elucidating those issues.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: EXPANDING THE SINGAPORE STORY

The basis of Singapore history, as an academic field of study, has not changed much since the initial general histories offered by Constance Mary Turnbull and others.[1] The underlying question driving most inquiries into Singapore's past can be surmised as why Singapore succeeded despite seemingly insurmountable odds. As such, histories of Singapore follow a template that usually begins with Stamford Raffles establishing a trading settlement on the island in 1819. They then take the reader through the interactions, moments and events, and personalities, pre-identified to be significant. Those typically involved an overview of the colonial period, the ethnic differences in society, the Second World War, and the postwar trials and tribulations, namely the struggles against communism, communalism, and then after 1965, for survival. The trope of a struggle against odds is popularly known as The Singapore Story. Since 1997, this has been the basis for a National Education program that has been embedded into various educational levels and during National Service.[2] The Singapore Story is also incidentally the title of the memoirs of the late Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first Prime Minister.[3]

Scholarly responses to the Singapore Story trope have, over time, enriched the field. Some add detail and expound on known events.[4] Others, such as the counter-responses, aim

[1] Representative histories include C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore, 1819-2005* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), Mark Ravinder Frost, Yu-mei Balsingamchow, *Singapore: A Biography* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet; National Museum of Singapore, c2009), and Edwin Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation* (Singapore: ISEAS, c2008). See also Ernest C. T. Chew and Edwin Lee (eds.), *A History of Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[2] The National Education program officially commenced in 1997. It was initially supported by an ambitious public exhibition in 1998 entitled "The Singapore Story: Overcoming the Odds", which produced companion educational and resource materials, such as Eugene Tan Hwi Choon, in consultation with Kwa Chong Guan, *The Singapore story: A Learning Nation – Select Bibliography* (Singapore: National Reference Library, National Library Board, 1998), and *The Singapore Story: Overcoming the Odds – An Interactive Multimedia Experience. A National Education Project by Ministry of Information and the Arts* (Singapore: MITA, c1999). National Education is not a stand-alone school subject, but communicated via suitable subjects, such as History, Geography, and Social Studies. Elements of the Singapore Story trope are also incorporated into lecture sessions during National Service, and form the basis of the Singapore Studies curriculum at the university level. For an overview, go to "Welcome to the MOE National Education Website". URL: http://ne.moe.edu.sg/ne/slot/u223/ne/index.html. Accessed 19 November 2016.

[3] Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings; Times Editions, 1998), and Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965-2000: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings; Times Editions, c2000). It is not the first book to have "Singapore Story" in its title. Noel Barber, a British journalist, had earlier published *The Singapore Story: From Raffles to Lee Kuan Yew* (London: Fontana, 1978).

[4] Singapore's constitutional and political changes have been analyzed by Albert Lau, *A Moment of Anguish: Singapore in Malaysia and the Politics of Disengagement* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998), Albert Lau, *The Malayan Union Controversy 1942-1948* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), and Tan Tai Yong, *Creating "Greater Malaysia": Decolonisation and the Politics of Merger* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008).

to highlight the deficiencies of the narrative, namely the excessive focus on the "victors" of history, mythmaking, and the historiographical concerns from uncritical engagement with a perceived metanarrative.[5] In doing so, Singapore's social and political histories, as well as scholarly examinations of Singapore historiography, have become more substantive since the beginning of the twenty-first century.[6] There have also been efforts to rethink historical conventions, such as the place of Raffles and 1819, and to situate Singapore's past in broader historical contexts, such as the Malay-speaking world, European imperialism in Southeast Asia, and World history.[7] They have enriched Singapore history by enhancing our knowledge about Singapore's past and adding nuance to historiographical approaches.

The increased quantity in historical scholarship provides a sound foundation from which we can move beyond the conventional template of significant "national" moments,

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[5] Representative publications include: Loh Kah Seng, "Within the Singapore Story: The Use and Narrative of History in Singapore", *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1998), pp. 1-21; the essays in Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli, *The Scripting of a National History: Singapore and Its Past* (Singapore: NUS Press, c2008), Michael D. Barr and Zlatko Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity and the Nation-Building Project* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008), chapter two, and Terence Chong, "Introduction: The Role of Success in Singapore's National Identity", in Terence Chong (ed.), *Management of Success : Singapore Revisited* (Singapore : Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010). More recently, historians, scholars, and former political dissenters have combined efforts, resulting in the following Tan Jing Quee and Jomo K.S. (original eds.); Poh Soo Kai (2015 edition), *Comet In Our Sky: Lim Chin Siong In History* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: SIRD & Pusat Sejarah Rakyat, 2015), Poh Soo Kai, Tan Kok Fang and Hong Lysa, (eds.), *The 1963 Operation Coldstore In Singapore: Commemorating 50 Years* (Malaysia: SIRD & Pusat Sejarah Rakyat, 2013), Tan Jing Quee, Tan Kok Chiang & Hong Lysa (eds.), *The May 13 Generation: The Chinese Middle Schools Student Movement And Singapore Politics In The 1950s* (Selangor: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, c2011), Poh Soo Kai, Tan Jing Quee, Koh Kay Yew (eds.), *The Fajar Generation: The University Socialist Club and The Politics of Postwar Malaya and Singapore* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: SIRD, 2010).

[6] See for instance James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San: Prostitution in Singapore, 1870-1940* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, c2003. Originally published in 1986), James Francis Warren, *Rickshaw Coolie: A People's History of Singapore 1880-1940* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, c2003. Originally published in 1993), Brenda S. A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and The Urban Built Environment* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, c2003. Originally published in 1996), Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and The Culture of Control* (London: Routledge, 2006), Michael Barr and Carl A. Trocki (eds.), *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, c2008), and Loh Kah Seng, *Squatters into Citizens: The 1961 Bukit Ho Swee Fire and The Making of Modern Singapore* (Singapore: Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with NUS Press and NIAS Press, c2013). Historiographical examinations include: Nicholas Tarling (ed.), *Studying Singapore's Past: C.M. Turnbull and The History of Modern Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, c2012), Loh Kah Seng & Liew Kai Khiun (eds.), *The Makers & Keepers of Singapore History* (Singapore: Ethos Books; Singapore Heritage Society, c2010), and Derek Heng Thiam Soon (ed.), *New Perspectives and Sources on The History of Singapore: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach* (Singapore: National Library Board, c2006).

[7] Representative publications include Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng, Tan Tai Yong, *Singapore: A 700-Year History: From Early Emporium to World City* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore, c2009), Carl A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore, 1784-1885* (Singapore: NUS Press, c2007. 2nd ed.), John N. Miksic, *Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea, 1300-1800* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013), Derek Heng and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied (eds.), *Singapore in Global History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, c2011, Karl Hack and Jean-Louis Margolin, with Karine Delaye (eds.), *Singapore From Temasek to the 21st Century: Reinventing the Global City* (Singapore: NUS Press, c2010), and Peter Borschberg, *The Singapore and Melaka Straits: Violence, Security and Diplomacy in the 17th Century* (Singapore: NUS Press, c2010).

events, and personalities. Here, my approach takes its cue from Harry Benda's observations in his 1961 article, "The Structure of Southeast Asian History".[8] Benda spoke of moving beyond a model of "historical interactions", as

> focusing on the record of such contacts may do little by way of accounting for the probable internal dynamics underlying them…. The dramatic personae – the lusty potentates, usurpers, adventurers and their retinues … disappear from the stage, to make room for the bloodless bureaucratic administrators of modern colonial regimes. The history of modern Southeast Asia then only too often becomes the history of European colonial regimes, from which Southeast Asians … get progressively drained. And yet, it is in the most recent, 'history-less', era that structural changes of perhaps unparalleled proportions and vehemence grip the area.[9]

Benda's article was originally in response to a debate (in decolonizing Malaya and Singapore) over the place of a local or externalist (colonial) view in the writing of Southeast Asian history.[10] It is not my intent to uncover the "Southeast Asian", or in this case, a

[8] Harry J. Benda, "The Structure of Southeast Asian History: Some Preliminary Observations", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Mar., 1962), pp. 106-138. Benda's use of "structure" in the article was to contrast with the conventional focus on historical "events", and also in response to George Cœdès' "Southeast Asian infrastructure", as used in the latter's 1948 publication, *Les états hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie*, which was translated and published in English as *The Indianized states of Southeast Asia*; edited by Walter F. Vella; translated by Sue Brown Cowing (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, c1968). As such, Benda's use of "structure" draws less from the "structuralist movement" found in anthropology, literary and linguistic studies, and more from the *longue durée* concept espoused by the Annales School and Fernand Braudel in particular. In his preface to the first edition of *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Braudel distinguishes three historical times: the slow, "almost timeless" "geographical time" (*l'histoire quasi immobile*), the "slow, perceptible rhythms" of "social time" (the history of "groups and groupings) (*longue durée*), and "individual time", or *histoire événementielle*, ("the history of events: surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs. A history of brief, rapid, nervous fluctuations, by definition ultra-sensitive; the least tremor sets all its antennae quivering") (pp. 20-21). Braudel expounded on these concepts in a 1958 article, in particular the *longue durée*. (Wallerstein did not translate the term, choosing to use the original French instead). Braudel explained variations of the *longue durée*, first as "cycles" and/or "intercycles", as "secular trends", and finally, as "structures". Braudel (translated by Wallerstein) elaborated: "By 'structure', social observers imply an organization, a degree of coherency, rather fixed relation between realities and social masses. For us historians, a structure is certainly an assemblage, an architecture, but even more it is a reality that time can only slowly erode, one that goes on for a long time. Certain structures, in their long life, become the stable elements of an infinity of generations. They encumber history and restrict it, and hence control its flow. Other structures crumble more quickly. But all structures are simultaneously pillars and obstacles…. Think of how difficult it is to break through geographical frameworks, certain biological realities, certain limits to productivity, even one or another spiritual constraint. Mental frameworks are also prisons of the *longue durée*". Braudel, "in "History and the Social Sciences", pp. 178-179. The last term was apparently replicated in early Southeast Asian historiography, through Benda's article, which was published four years after Braudel's 1958 article. Anthony Reid has built on this concept in his two-volume *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*. (This draws on Immanuel Wallerstein's translation of Fernand Braudel's "History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée". *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 32, No .2 (2009), pp. 171-203. Originally published as "Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée". *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*. Vol. 12, No. 4 (1958): pp. 725-753).

[9] Benda, "The Structure of Southeast Asian History", pp. 111-112.

[10] See also John Smail, "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol 2, No. 2, (Jun., 1961), pp. 72-102. Originally a paper read at a 1961 conference for

"Singaporean" perspective. Rather, I want to engage some of the "unparalleled" structural changes that had affected colonial Singapore. In this study, those changes refer to the dynamics contributing to and arising from the shift in colonial policy, particularly the change from a situation where state and society were reluctant to act even when confronted with evidence of poverty and destitution, to a situation where a deliberate official state presence in social welfare was present and even welcomed.

Colonialism and Social Welfare in Singapore History

A deliberate examination of these changes underpins a better appreciation of the impact of colonialism on Singapore state and society. Studies of Singapore's past typically take British colonialism for granted. In other words, colonialism was a specific but mere period of time preceding independent Singapore.[11] The study of the origins and evolution of colonial policy, and crucially, their implications, is all but absent in examinations of Singapore's path to unexpected independence in 1965 and its nation-building efforts before and thereafter.[12] Early histories of Singapore are products of a time when historical

Southeast Asian history in Singapore, Smail's article was in response to a debate between the two heads of the history departments in the Singapore and Kuala Lumpur branches of the University of Malaya, respectively Kennedy G. Tregonning and John Bastin. The former had stated that the European presence in Southeast Asia was incidental at best (See Tregonning's reviews of *Malaya: A Political and Economic Appraisal*, by L. A. Mills, and *Malaya*, by N. Ginsberg and C.F. Robert, *Journal of South Seas Society*, Vol. 14, Issue 1 & 2, 1958, pp. 123-124. Bastin responded in his 1959 inaugural lecture. See John S. Bastin, *The Study of Modern Southeast Asian History; An Inaugural Lecture Delivered in The University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur on 14 December, 1959* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, 1959). Smail's thoughts set the tone and direction in approaching Southeast Asia's past via a perspective autonomous of nationalistic sentiments and colonial perspectives. Ho Chi Tim discusses the centricity debates in "The Intellectual and Institutional Origins of *JSEAH* and *JSEAS*", *ISA (International Sociological Association) E-Bulletin*, Number 15, March 2010. For a recent comprehensive overview of Southeast Asian historiography, see Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c.800-1830 / Vol. I: Integration on the Mainland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chapter 1.

[11] For instance, Edwin Lee gives an uncomplicated cause-and-effect interpretation of the colonial period on Singapore society in *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation*, making it appear as if colonialism was merely a period before the nation. Lee does examine in more detail the effects of British rule in *The British as Rulers*. But the narrative does not go beyond a top-down, cause-effect dichotomy.

[12] Scholarly focus tends to be extremely localized. Colonial policy is acknowledged insofar to explain decisions on local developments in Singapore. See for instance Albert Lau, "Nationalism" in the Decolonization of Singapore", in Marc Frey, Ronald Pruessen, and Tan Tai Yong (eds.), *The Transformation of Southeast Asia: International Perspectives on Decolonization* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), pp. 180-196, and Edwin Lee, *Singapore: An Unexpected Nation*. Lee focused more on the actions and decisions of "local" individuals and parties, revolving around the Singapore Story narrative of a struggle against difficult circumstances. British colonialism was acknowledged insofar that Raffles founded a trade settlement on the island in 1819, and the British governed the island until self-government in 1959 and independence with Malaysia in 1963. The counterpart nation-building histories for Malaysia and Indonesia engage more fully the colonial legacies in the creation of certain types of societies. See Cheah Boon Kheng's *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), chapter one; and Taufik Abdullah adopts a

scholarship was relatively less complicated. Pioneering historians of Singapore (and Malaya) possessed worldviews predominantly influenced by the reality of being a British colony. This approach has produced histories centered on the "bloodless bureaucratic administrators of modern colonial regimes".[13] Recent histories of Singapore, while advancing Singapore historiography, generally treat British colonialism similarly, either as an historical backdrop, or as an "object" to critique and / or to get past (so as to tell or to counter the Singapore Story). Sympathetic historians have presented British colonialism as the forerunner of modernity in Singapore, transforming a quiet fishing village into a thriving and cosmopolitan port city.[14] Less neutral perspectives have presented British rule as negligent, bringing about social ills, and as a conduit for state surveillance and repressive measures.[15] Such observations are not inaccurate. But they contain assumptions that understate, hide even, structural changes. Colonialism in Singapore after the Second World War was fundamentally different from colonialism before the war. The very idea of a colonial government deliberately being involved in the personal affairs of an individual at different life stages was new. Colonialism becomes more than a mere period of historical time. It was a phenomenon that provoked, intentionally or otherwise, myriad historical experiences.

This study uses social welfare as a medium to understand those experiences better and in doing so, to address and engage conventional notions of colonialism in Singapore. The

similar approach in *Indonesia: Towards Democracy* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), chapters one and two.

[13] See for instance Wong Lin Ken, *The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914, with Special Reference to the States of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang* (Tucson: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by the University of Arizona Press, 1965), Wong Lin Ken, *The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69* / with a new introduction by Wang Gungwu (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society; Bandar Puchong Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: Printed for the MBRAS by Academe Art & Print. Services Sdn. Bhd. Malaysia, c2003. Originally published in 1961), Eunice Thio, *British Policy in the Malay Peninsula, 1880-1910* (Singapore, University of Malaya Press, 1969), Yeo Kim Wah, *Politics of Decentralization: Colonial Controversy in Malaya 1920-1929* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press [for] ISEAS, 1982), Yong Mun Cheong, *H .J. Van Mook and Indonesian Independence: A Study of His Role in Dutch-Indonesian Relations, 1945-48* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Library, 1982), and Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers: Governing Multi-Racial Singapore 1867-1914* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, c1991).

[14] Examples include the inclusion of "modern" in the title of the third edition of Mary Turnbull's classic history of Singapore – earlier editions were simply "A History of Singapore"; and Edwin Lee's exposition of inheritance of "modern' structures in government, economy, and approaches to society in "The Colonial Legacy" in Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (eds.), *Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989).

[15] For instance, James Warren writes in *Rickshaw Coolie*: "Examination of the major sequential decisions made by the Colonial Government of Singapore in regard to housing, water supply, waste disposal and sewerage from the 1880s to 1930s, shows that the city's rulers consistently chose alternatives the minimized costs at the expense of the coolie population". (p. 325). In his study of the Maria Hertogh riots of 1950, Khairudin Aljunied presents the British colonial state as one that resorted, as part of its response to the riots, to increased surveillance and expansion of policing and suppressive measures. See Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Colonialism, Violence and Muslims in Southeast Asia: The Maria Hertogh Controversy and Its Aftermath* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), in particular chapters 3 and 4.

meaning of "social welfare" is elastic, shifting according to context and purpose. In the broadest understanding possible, the idea of welfare refers to the "well-being" of society or individuals, or simply put, what is good for people.[16] In a narrower sense, welfare refers to "public payments or services given to individuals to support them".[17] The latter understanding, while helpful in providing a precise focus, does not immediately capture the complexities involved in providing financial assistance or a personal social service, and the broader contexts in which such assistance or services are given in the first place. The narrower definition is moreover one value judgement away from a social stigma.[18] The broader understanding of social welfare is more suited to a wide-ranging historical study. The well-being of society covers a wide – perhaps infinite – range, as social needs do evolve over time and differ in different locations. This approach lends itself to theoretical examinations of the dynamics and consequences of social policy, the social theories that underpin and drive people's words and deeds in different contexts, and of power relations within society and/or between state and society.[19]

This study does not attempt to theorize Singapore's colonial or post-colonial approach to welfare. Its first priority is to build up the necessary empirical foundation for further research into less familiar parts of Singapore history. The following chapters focus principally on the historical developments and structural changes in Singapore's colonial

[16] Paul Spicker, *Principles of Social Welfare: An Introduction to Thinking about the Welfare State*, p. 8. Originally published by Routledge in 1998. See also Martin O'Brien and Sue Penna, *Theorising Welfare: Enlightenment and Modern Society* (London: Sage, 1998), pp. 7-8.

[17] Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 2.

[18] From the mid-1970s, the term "welfare" became either a description of a state of dependency or a synonym for financial assistance given to particular sections of society. Katz cites former President Bill Clinton's promise "to end welfare as we know it...." in *The Price of Citizenship*, p. 1. Such usage is generally more prevalent in America, though there are similar tones in Britain. See Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2003, third ed.), pp. 280-295.

[19] In *Theorising Welfare*, O'Brien and Penna highlight and discuss the theoretical underpinnings of various intellectual responses to social needs in modern (European) society over time, connecting and organizing those as the by-products of and responses to the Enlightenment, such as Liberalism, Marxism, Neo-liberalism, and Poststructuralism. The latter, O'Brien and Penna suggest, was part of an intellectual response emerging during the 1960s that questioned the linearity of Enlightenment-based ideologies and values, such as modernity and progress. Here, Michel Foucault's theoretical work on discourse, power and knowledge, surveillance and governmentality, brought to bear on public and private issues such as government, the body, gender, and sexuality, have been engaged to explicate various aspects of social work and social policy. See O'Brien and Penna, *Theorising Welfare*, pp. 2-4 and 108-132. See also contributions in Adrienne S. Chambon, Allan Irving, Laura Epstein (eds.), *Reading Foucault for Social Work* (New York: Columbia University Press, c1999); Martin Hewitt, "Bio-Politics and Social Policy: Foucault's Account of Welfare". *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (February 1983), pp. 67-84; Simon Biggs and Jason L. Powell, "A Foucauldian Analysis of Old Age and the Power of Social Welfare". *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (February 2001), pp. 93-112; and Jason L. Powell and Hafiz T.A. Khan, "Foucault, Social Theory and Social Work". *Sociologie Romaneasca*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2012), pp. 131-147.

state and society. In doing so, the study provides the historical context to existing scholarship on social welfare and social policy in Singapore, an area hitherto dominated by economists, sociologists, and social work professionals. Their focus is typically on the contemporary and on policy. They give a brief historical outline of social policies and services up to the point of the study, after which they examine the effectiveness of social policies, or to situate Singapore's social policies within East and Southeast Asia.[20] To that end, this study could be used as a historical basis for an informed and grounded study of the theoretical underpinnings of Singapore's historical responses to social needs.

The few publications that provide historical overviews generally attribute the introduction of social welfare to the need to address social dislocations resulting from the Japanese Occupation and the ascension of the British Labour Party in 1945.[21] Within those overviews are hints of a nuanced history of how and why social welfare came to Singapore. Discussing social welfare in the context of Singapore's postwar socio-political developments, Mary Turnbull noted the changing attitudes in Europe "towards the role of government ... after the Second World War", where "citizens came to demand more active official involvement in providing social services and improving living standards at home and in the colonies".[22] Positing progress and stability as the objectives of governance, she also observed that "both the colonial authorities and the Progressives [the Singapore Progressive Party]

[20] Social welfare is these instances, is a part of a social policy that encompasses health, education, public housing and social security; or refers to specific social policies, legislation or services dealing with poverty alleviation, social security, or community development. See Linda Y. C. Lim, "Social Welfare", in Sandhu and Wheatley (eds.), *Management of Success*, pp. 171-197, Nalia Tan, "Health and Welfare", in Chew and Lee (eds.), *A History of Singapore*, pp. 339-356; Ann Wee, "Where We Are Coming From: Social and Welfare Interventions When Singapore Was a British Colony", in Ann Wee & Kalyani K. Mehta (eds.), *Social Work in the Singapore Context - Second Edition* (Singapore: Pearson Education South Asia Pte. Ltd., 2011), pp. 21-72; Linda Low and Aw Tar Choon's *Social Insecurity in the New Millennium: The Central Provident Fund in Singapore* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2004) and *Housing A Healthy, Educated And Wealthy Nation Through The CPF* (Singapore: Times Academic Press for the Institute of Policy Studies, 1997); Mukul Govinda Asher, *Compulsory Savings In Singapore: An Alternative to the Welfare State* (Dallas, Tex.: National Center for Policy Analysis, 1995) and *Social Adequacy and Equity of the Social Security Arrangements in Singapore* (Singapore: Times Academic Press for the Centre for Advanced Studies, 1991); and M. Ramesh, *Social Policy in East And Southeast Asia: Education, Health, Housing and Income Maintenance* (New York, N.Y.: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004) and "One and a half cheers for provident funds in Malaysia and Singapore", in Kwon Huck-Ju (ed.), *Transforming the Developmental Welfare State in East Asia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, N.Y: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 191-208; and Tang Kwong Leung, *Social Welfare Development in East Asia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, N.Y.: Palgrave, 2000).

[21] In addition to Ann Wee's chapter, historians Edwin Lee and Mary Turnbull also explained the introduction of colonial social welfare similarly. See Lee's "Colonial Legacy", in *Management of Success*, p. 37, and Turnbull's *A History of Modern Singapore*, pp. 241-243. It is probable that Wee and the historians referred to the first official report of the Singapore Department of Social Welfare.

[22] Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, p. 241.

recognized the need for a new approach to social welfare and education if Singapore was to become a settled, self-governing society".[23]

This "new approach" refers to a government assuming more responsibility for the well-being of the people, differing from the prewar *laissez faire* approach that had influenced Singapore's economy and governance since Raffles.[24] Edwin Lee observes a change in the style of governance, commenting that the "radical thinking on welfare in post-war Britain and the war-ravaged conditions in Singapore caused an important step to be taken, namely, the establishment of the Department of Social Welfare in June 1946".[25] Discussing the origins of social services in Singapore, Ann Wee does not deviate much from the narrative adopted by the historians. She does however highlight a continuity from the Chinese Protectorate, first established in 1877, to the new social welfare department created.[26] With minor differences, all three histories see the Social Welfare Department as an example of a break from a prewar *laissez faire* approach to governance to a situation where state intervention to improve the well-being of society was not merely tolerated but actively pursued.

At a minimal, the above suggests a much more substantive history of social welfare in Singapore than is currently acknowledged. This history has been hidden by negative

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[23] Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, p. 241. Turnbull summarizes the main highlights of the work of the Department in a couple of paragraphs. Her treatment of the origins of colonial social welfare was cursory, unavoidably so in a general history of Singapore.

[24] The term *laissez faire* is used in this study as it was understood by policymakers and intellectuals at the height of colonial policy discussions during the 1930s and 1940s, and later by historians and scholars of Singapore state, economy and society. Generally speaking, *laissez faire* refers primarily to an economic system relatively free of government intervention. Historically speaking, it was a philosophy usually associated (rather simply at times) with Adam Smith's writings, and was formed in response to mercantilism and supporting state activism prevalent between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The term however has been historically conflated to include approaches to governance and society, as seen in John Furnivall's historicizing of colonial policy and administration (Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, Chapter 2); and Derek Fraser's description of Britain's pre-welfare state approach to social policy (Fraser, *British Welfare State*, Chapter 5). In Singapore history, Raffles is popularly understood as the introducer of *laissez faire* principles to Singapore, but as Turnbull subtly noted, that was only in the economic sense, the prime example being Singapore's free port status. Raffles' guiding principles were more mixed, ranging from a humanitarian impulse (seen in his opposition to slavery), a belief in the moral attributes of government (seen in his plans for education to mitigate the excesses of free trade), and to approaches that were in line with Jeremy Bentham and the Utilitarians (as seen in his belief in the rule of law, town planning, and the penal system). (See Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, pp. 36-50). The colonial state in Singapore could be more accurately understood as a limited or a minimal state, to protect basic liberties and to maintain a free trade economy. For a discussion of the limited / minimal state, see Leszek Balcerowicz, "Toward a Limited State". *Cato Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Fall 2004), pp. 186, 191-192, and a useful overview of the historical evolution to a "positive state", Howard M. Leichter, *A Comparative Approach to Policy Analysis: Health Care Policy in Four Nations* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), Chapter 2. The idea of a limited state has a long history rooted in Liberal traditions roots, and is generally traced to John Locke's writings on the role of government in *The Second Treatise of Civil Government*, first published in 1690. See relevant readings in Ronald J. Terchek and Thomas C. Conte (eds.), *Theories of Democracy: A Reader* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001).

[25] Lee, "Colonial Legacy", p. 37.

[26] Wee, "Where We Are Coming From", pp. 27-33 and 48.

perceptions of welfare at the highest levels of policymaking and further perpetuated in scholarship. Since independence in 1965, successive People's Action Party governments have publicly asserted that Western-style welfarism was not for Singapore. Such assertions have been colored by Lee Kuan Yew's vision of a "fair, not welfare" society. In his memoirs, Lee explained:

> when governments undertook primary responsibility for the basic duties of the head of a family, the drive in people weakened. Welfare undermined self-reliance. People did not have to work for their families' well-being. The handout became a way of life. The downward spiral was relentless as motivation and productivity went down. People lost the drive to achieve because they paid too much in taxes. They became dependent on the state for their basic needs.[27]

Lee's views on Singapore's social policy persisted long after he stepped down as Prime Minister. At various points during their tenure as Prime Ministers, his successors, Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong, have warned Singaporeans not to construe government social assistance as a step towards a "welfare state", and to avoid "dependency mentality" or a "welfare mentality".[28] In those instances, the terms "welfare" and "welfare state" have been understood as synonyms for cash hand-outs, a state of dependency, or as a warning of the excesses of European-style welfarism.[29] Such interpretations have built up a certain impression of an anti-welfare state in Singapore, an impression reinforced to some extent by public and scholarly commentaries.[30] For instance, even though financial assistance amounts increased in 2007, Chua Beng Huat observed that the Singapore government

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[27] Lee, *From Third World to First*, p. 126.

[28] National Archives of Singapore (NAS), Speeches and Press Releases (SPR). Goh Chok Tong, [no title], (Speech at The Swearing-in Ceremony of Mayors of Community Development Council Districts on Saturday, 5 January 2002); Lee Hsien Loong, [no title], (Speech at the launch of ComCare, 28 June 2005).

[29] On Singapore's narrow interpretation of welfare, see Ng Kok Hoe, "Four Fallacies about the Singapore Welfare State", in *Social Dimension Singapore: The Online Blog Magazine for Singapore Social Work*. http://www.social-dimension.com/2011/09/four-fallacies-about-the-singapore-welfare-state.html. Accessed 8 July 2016. For a concise summary of government views on welfare over time, see Philip Mendes, "An Australian Perspective on Singaporean Welfare Policy" in *Social Work and Society-The International Online-Only Journal*, Vol. 5, no. 1, 2007.

[30] Jacqueline Loh writes "Singapore has always adopted a firm anti-welfare approach in its social and economic policy..." in "Bottom Fifth in Singapore", *Social Space*, Issue 4, 2011, p. 68. See also Lian Kwen Fee, "Is There a Social Policy in Singapore", in Lian Kwen Feeand Tong Chee Kiong (eds.), *Social policy in post-industrial Singapore* (Boston: Brill, 2008), Chua Beng Huat, "Emerging Issues in Developmental Welfarism in Singapore", in James Lee and Kam-wah Chan (eds.), *The Crisis Of Welfare In East Asia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, c2007), and his quotes in *The Straits Times*, 22 March 2008, "Welfare spending: Is it just about money?"; *The Straits Times*, 21 March 2008, "Singapore's new welfarism: 'Give it to them'"; *The Economist*, 13 February 2010, "The stingy nanny: The city-state stays strict with the needy", and *The Straits Times*, 1 September 2015, "Beware the welfarism trap".

> continues to maintain a three-point principle: fostering self-reliant individuals, family as the first line of support, and "many helping hands". … This mode has enabled the government to displace the idea that social welfare of the needy is the sole responsibility of the state, instead of just contributing its share as a constitutive part of the helping hands, and avoid the idea that citizens are "entitled" to state welfare provisions.[31]

While factual, these observations do not immediately explain the considerable and sustained state interventions over time to ensure a certain level of individual and community well-being. Affordable housing, for instance, has always been hailed as one of the cornerstones of a "fair, not welfare, society".[32] From 1960, the Housing and Development Board's public housing program was consistently expanded and intensified to the point where over 80% of Singapore's population have been housed in (and owned) apartment flats since 1985.[33] The Central Provident Fund scheme, an inheritance from the colonial period, is a compulsory savings program originally for retirement. The scheme has been adjusted over time, creating a series of sub-accounts to pay for healthcare needs, as well as for housing and children's education.[34] More recently, the principle of self-reliance has also been undermined by successive economic downturns, persistent concerns with structural unemployment, an aging population, increased costs of living, and electoral setbacks. Since the twenty-first century, income transfers from the state to the individual have substantially increased.[35] From 2006, older, low-income workers received Workfare payouts as an incentive to stay employed.[36] In 2014, workers in selected low-income occupations was ensured a minimum

[31] Chua, "Emerging Issues in Developmental Welfarism in Singapore", p. 36. The Many Helping Hands approach and the reasons for the shift are discussed in Ho Chi Tim and Ann Wee, "Singapore Chronicles: Social Services" (forthcoming publication by Institute of Policy Studies and Straits Times Press).
[32] Lee, *From Third World to First*, p. 126.
[33] Belinda Yuen, "Squatters No More: Singapore Social Housing", *Global Urban Development Magazine*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, November 2007. See also Asad Latif's biography of Lim Kim San, the first chairman of the Housing and Development Board, for a more personal take on the task of developing Singapore's public housing. Asad-ul Iqbal Latif, *Lim Kim San: A Builder of Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009).
[34] The Central Provident Fund is presented in the official website as a "…comprehensive social security system that enables working Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents to set aside funds for retirement. It also addresses healthcare, home ownership, family protection and asset enhancement". Central Provident Fund Board, *CPF Overview*. https://www.cpf.gov.sg/Members/AboutUs/about-us-info/cpf-overview. Accessed 9 June 2016. The website describes Singapore's approach to social policy: "Singapore's social policies embody its national philosophy of an active government support for self-reliance. This reinforces individual effort and responsibility for the family: values that keep our society strong". Central Provident Fund Board, "History of CPF". https://www.cpf.gov.sg/Members/AboutUs/about-us-info/history-of-cpf. Accessed 9 June 2016.
[35] One of the earliest forms of income transfers was the New Singapore Shares and the Economic Restructuring Shares, both of which were given out in 2001 and 2003 respectively to help lower-income households to deal with economic downturns. The government also gives annual rebates for utilities (such as water and electricity).
[36] One year later, Workfare payouts became more regular as the scheme was modified to provide quarterly, instead of annual, "income supplements" to low-wage workers who stay employed for at least three consecutive months. I received $127 as a "low-wage worker" in November 2013. For an examination of the introduction of

entry-level wage via a Progressive Wage Model.[37] From July 2016, pension-like grants will be given to the low-income elderly on a permanent and regular basis as part of a Silver Support Scheme. There has also been talk of introducing some form of social insurance in Singapore.[38] One version of it came to pass in late 2015 with Medishield Life, a universal health insurance scheme that covered for life the medical needs of Singaporeans.[39] The creation in late 2012 of a new Ministry of Social and Family Development moreover poses another intriguing historical continuity. The new ministry oversees the present-day versions of functions and services that first appeared more than sixty years ago in June 1946.[40] Then, they were introduced by the colonial government and administered by the Social Welfare Department. Social welfare, at that time, was not objectionable. It "signified a broad and progressive program with wide public support", while the "welfare state embodied a generation's hopes and aspirations for universal economic security and protection from the worst consequences of life's ordinary hazards".[41]

Expanding Singapore History

These seeming colonial continuities call for a reconsideration of Singapore history and historiography. Via social welfare history, or in other words, an understanding of how state and society responded over time to various social needs, Singapore's allegedly "short history" expands considerably in scope and depth. For instance, the introduction of a social welfare department in 1946 was a manifestation of a colonial policy of development and welfare. That policy was the result of historical processes located outside the usual ambits of Singapore historiography, which are typically limited writing or countering the Singapore

Workfare in Asia, see Irene Y. H. Ng, "Workfare in Singapore", in K. C. Chak & K. Ngok (eds.), *Welfare Reform in East Asia: Towards Workfare?* (U.K.: Routledge, 2011).

[37] Tharman Shamugaratnam, [No Title] (Speech given at the e2i Best Sourcing Symposium on 8 January 2014).

[38] See Manu Bhaskaran, et. al., "Background Paper. Inequality and the Need for a New Social Compact", in Kang Soon Hock and Leong Chan-Hoong (eds.), *Singapore Perspectives 2012 – Singapore Inclusive: Bridging Divides* (Singapore; Hackensack, N. J.: World Scientific Pub. Co., c2013).

[39] Singapore Ministry of Health, "Home – Medishield Life". https://www.medishieldlife.sg/. Accessed on 8 June 2016. MediShield Life is a national health insurance scheme that provides lifelong protection for all Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents against large medical bills". The scheme is compulsory, removes the previous limit of ninety years of age, and covers all pre-existing medical conditions. "

[40] Singapore Ministry of Social and Family Development, "History & Milestones – Ministry of Social and Family Development". http://app.msf.gov.sg/AboutMSF/OurOrganisation/HistoryMilestones.aspx. Accessed 5 July 2016. (Webpage was last amended on 30 July 2014). See also Singapore Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, *Helping Hands Touching Lives: 60 Years Making a Difference* (Singapore: Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), 2007).

[41] Katz, *The Price of Citizenship*, p. 1

Story. Conceptually, the deliberate introduction of a seemingly benevolent policy in a colonial situation encourages a reconsideration of colonialism, in all of its aspects, in Singapore history.[42] This is especially so when key institutions and processes of the social welfare state created during the late colonial period exist still in present-day Singapore. This in turn raises questions about the categories of colonizer and colonized during the decolonization process, the role of individuals in bringing forth change at the state and societal level, the colonial-era structures (and their underlying assumptions) inherited and brought forward into the post-colonial period, and from there, their impact on our historical and contemporary understanding of social policy, state formation, and nation-building.

These are not limited to Singapore, and when fully expounded on, can better explicate Singapore's historical connections to colonial and post-colonial Southeast Asia, the British Empire, and global developments. This study attempts to understand those connections via a history of state-building, in particular the act and consequences of building a social welfare state in late colonial Singapore. Those attempts were part of a new colonial policy to create a more cohesive community after the Second World War, one that would be self-governing and eventually join similar nations within the British sphere of influence. The history is a local one based in Singapore. But colonial welfare originated from a mesh of metropolitan, imperial, and global factors and processes. Its consequent introduction and implementation in postwar Singapore were further complicated by local circumstances, such as the absence of precedent for an official presence in social welfare (and its implications), the obstructive nature of colonial society, and the challenges of decolonization. My research was guided by two questions: How did state and society in colonial Singapore respond to social needs at various points in a human life, such as birth, youth and adulthood, illness and injury, work and unemployment, old age and retirement, and death? What kind of state eventually emerged to address those needs?

In addressing those questions, this study offers an augmented understanding of state-building. The state is more than a series of institutions, bureaucracies, and policies, erected

[42] Following a seminar, a historian residing in Singapore remarked that it is odd for Singaporeans to perceive colonialism as a negative experience. Coming from someone who teaches history, his rather careless comment, and its underlying assumptions, have troubling and uncomfortable implications for the study of Singapore's past in the country. For one, he has ignored or dismissed the historical experiences of individuals and communities that have been excluded from a supposed colonial success story in Singapore, such as ethnic, linguistic and social class minorities, and political opposition. He is also ignorant of substantial research that have highlighted colonial-era suppression of student activists, trade unions and political dissent. Worse, the underlying assumption of his comment, that colonialism was beneficial for Singapore, risks essentializing Singapore's colonial experience, and from a professional point of view, misses the opportunity to engage colonialism as a historical experience, whether in Southeast Asia or in other parts of the world.

and maintained for the purposes of administering a population within a territory.[43] It is also made up of historical processes and lived experiences arising from individual decisions, actions, and interactions.[44] The social welfare state, as seen in the title of this study, refers to the institutions such as the Social Welfare Department and related organizations, and to the structures and processes maintained by individuals working within or with those institutions to effect social welfare. This study puts at the forefront the latter. These were the migrant worker, the colonial administrator, the social welfare officer, the concerned citizen, the lady volunteer, and the social worker. Their various needs, concerns, and interactions, understood in their own right, are more than a mere foil for or a simplistic counter-response to historical metanarratives. Taken together, their lives and experiences give coherency and structure to the social welfare state, namely its institutions, processes and interactions, that emerged in late colonial Singapore. Moreover, each individual had experienced colonialism differently and vividly, providing an opportunity to understand colonialism not merely as a period of time in Singapore's past, but also as a conduit to better appreciate the diverse array of historical experiences arising from a period of Singapore history usually taken for granted.

The Global Origins of Colonial Welfare

Singapore's social welfare history is an indelible part of the origins and development of colonial welfare. The shift from an earlier and relative *laissez faire* approach to colonial

[43] Conventional approaches to the state draw from Max Weber's definition: "The state exists whenever there is a special apparatus that has a monopoly on the use of force in a given territory". Quoted in Leszek Balcerowicz, "Toward a Limited State". *Cato Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Fall 2004), p. 185; originally from Max Weber's *Economy and Society*.

[44] My understanding of the state is informed by Benedict Anderson's description: "The state has to be understood as an institution [emphasis in original text], of the same species as the Church, the university, and the modern corporation. Like them, it ingests and excretes personnel in a continuous, steady process, often over long periods of time…. [T]he state not only has its own memory but harbors self-preserving and self-aggrandizing impulses, which at any given moment are 'expressed' through its living members, but which cannot be reduced to their passing personal ambitions". Cited in Robert Taylor, *The State in Myanmar* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), p. 4. (Originally published in 1987 as *The State in Burma* (London: C. Hurst & Co.). Anderson's quote comes from "Old State, New Society: Indonesia's New Order in Comparative Historical Perspective', *Journal of Asian Studies*, XLII, 3 (May 1983), p. 478. In addition to Weber's definition, another useful definition: "A state is the means of rule over a defined or "sovereign" territory. It is comprised of an executive, a bureaucracy, courts and other institutions. But, above all, a state levies taxes and operates a military and police force. States distribute and re-distribute resources and wealth, so lobbyists, politicians and revolutionaries seek in their own way to influence or even to get hold of the levers of state power". Global Policy Forum, *What is a "State"?* https://www.globalpolicy.org/nations-a-states/what-is-a-state.html. Accessed 8 July 2016. For introductory overviews on the state, see Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975), and Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back in* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

governance to colonial welfare is part of a world history of responses to social needs.[45] The impetus for colonial welfare can be traced to the convergence of several broad historical developments. Those included increased imperial competition on the world stage, a shift in attitudes towards poverty and social needs in the metropole, and the impact of crisis moments, such as economic slumps and wars. All of those led to a reexamination of existing assumptions about social needs throughout the early decades of twentieth century, resulting in increased state responsibility for social security and other social services.

The Berlin Conference (1884-1885) and British Imperialism

The British Empire took on various forms in different time periods.[46] In the nineteenth century, the British Empire was a collection of overlapping components scattered across the world map. It was an "Empire of white settlement", located mainly in North America, parts of the Caribbean (or the West Indies), South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. It was also simultaneously an "Empire in India", and an "Empire of conquests or wartime acquisitions", otherwise known as the "dependent empire" that expanded between 1780 and 1914.[47] British Singapore was in the latter grouping, which included territories, settlements, and ports along the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. By the early nineteenth century, the British Empire was in the midst of discarding the vestiges of an "old colonial system" that was based on monopolies of trade and navigation routes and a subservient relationship between the colony and the home country.[48] The new system was based on the concepts of free trade and responsible

[45] Briefly, a world history narrative of responses to social needs begins with the agitation for civil and political rights during the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and the nineteenth century's drive for universal suffrage. The twentieth century welfare state represented the culmination of movements for a person's right to social and economic security. This teleology was first presented by Thomas Humphrey Marshall in his 1949 lecture on "Citizenship and Social Class" published in *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays* (Cambridge [Eng.] University Press, 1950). See also Peter Baldwin, "Beveridge in the Longue Duree", in John Hills, John Dutch, and Howard Glennester (eds.), *Beveridge and Social Security: An International Perspective* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1994). Albert O. Hirschman discusses the counter-responses to Marshall's teleology in *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991).

[46] It is conventionally accepted that there were several incarnations of the entity known as the British Empire. The first empire began with the Integerrenum (or the foundations of the Laws of Trade) in 1651, and ended with in the early nineteenth century with the "modification" and "dismantling" of the Navigation Acts. A second distinct "empire" was thought to exist in the period beginning with the Treaty of Paris in 1783, and ended during the 1850s and1860s. For an overview, see P. J. Marshall, "The First British Empire", and C. A. Bayly, "The Second British Empire", in Robin Winks and Wm. Roger Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V: Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[47] Andrew Porter, "Introduction: Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth Century", in Andrew Porter and Wm Roger Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 4.

[48] W. David McIntyre, *Colonies into Commonwealth* (Blandford P, 1966), pp. 17-19, 32-39.

government within the colonies. As the twentieth century beckoned however, competition, national and imperial, intensified. The imperial ambitions of Germany after its national unification in 1871, and other European nations, such as France, Russia, Italy and Belgium, and the emergence of United States of America and Japan, posed new challenges to the status of Britain as a Great Power. Imperialist fervor peaked during the final decades of the nineteenth century. From the 1870s, European nations organized expeditions into the African continent, extending European national competition more forcibly into the international arena. Tensions escalated in the wake of the French seizure of Tunisia in 1881, British intervention in Egypt in 1882, and increased German activity in the continent. In response, Otto von Bismarck, the German Chancellor, hosted an international conference in Berlin to preempt open hostilities. The Berlin West Africa Conference began in November 1884 and was concluded in February 1885. The final agreement, the General Act, laid down principles to govern the behavior of interested parties in Africa.[49]

The General Act had implications for imperial activities elsewhere in the world. Of relevance to this study were two articles known collectively as the principle of "effective occupation". Article 34 required "any power acquiring coastal territory on the African continent to notify all other such powers of their claim". Article 35 required signatories "to insure the establishment of authority in the regions occupied by them on the coasts of the African continent sufficient to protect existing rights...."[50] Taken together, these two articles meant that "the occupying power had to establish sufficient authority over its territories to ensure protection of its vested interests".[51] In practice, this meant colonial governments could not ignore potential interference from competitors. The threat of an alternative power

[49] They were: "Chapter I Declaration relative to Freedom of Trade in the Basin of the Congo, its Mouths and circumjacent Regions, with other Provisions connected therewith (Articles 1-7); Chapter II Declaration Relative to the Salve Trade (Article 9); Chapter III Declaration Relative to the Neutrality of the Territories Comprised in the Conventional Basin of the Congo (Articles 10-12); Chapter IV, Act of Navigation for the Congo (Articles 13-15); Chapter V, Act of Navigation for the Niger (Articles 26-33); Chapter VI, Declaration Relative to the Essential Conditions to be Observed in Order the new Occupations of the Coasts of the African Continent may be held to be Effective (Articles 34-35); Chapter VII General Dispositions". The conference included participants from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, the United States of America, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Sweden-Norway, and Turkey (Ottoman Empire).
[50] General Act of the Berlin Conference on West Africa, 26 February 1885. http://africanhistory.about.com/od/eracolonialism/l/bl-BerlinAct1885.htm. Accessed 13 January 2016.
[51] G. De Courcel, "The Berlin Act of 26 February 1885", in Stig Forster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald Robinson (eds.), *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884-1885 and The Onset of Partition* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 255. See also S. E. Crowe, *The Berlin West African Conference 1884–1885* (London: Longmans Green, 1942), p. 176 and chapter "The Third Basis: Effective Occupation"; I. Geiss, "Free Trade, Internationalization of the Congo Basin, and the Principle of Effective Occupation", in *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa*, pp. 269-270, and Frederick John Dealtry Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: F. Cass, 1965; fifth ed., first published in 1922), chapter 1.

intervening would, in theory at least, "encourage" a proactive approach to the administration of a colonial territory and its peoples, either via through direct territorial control, or through social policies, or both.[52] Such inclinations were, at that point in time, fundamentally at odds with the prevailing *laissez faire* philosophy of colonial governance and economy.

A direct connection has yet to be established between the "effective occupation" principle and the willingness of colonial governments to provide social services. It is interesting however to note a significant increase in colonial activity around and from the time of the Berlin Conference. This period of "high imperialism" did not merely entail the physical annexation of territories and thereafter maintenance of territorial boundaries. It also witnessed an expansion of the European presence in Africa and Asia, and the corresponding expansion of the reach and responsibilities of the colonial state. In Southeast Asia, the Dutch introduced the Ethical Policy in 1900, ostensibly for the well-being of the indigenous population in Java. The new policy required new state agencies to implement and enforce new measures for agricultural (irrigation), migration and education services.[53] Elsewhere, the Americans and the French implemented their particular brands of colonial rule in the Philippines and Indochina respectively. The former implemented an approach ostensibly with the end-goal of self-government and independence for the Philippines.[54] The latter, on the other hand, went into Indochina with a strong sense of the civilizing mission.[55] The British followed an imperial policy that was later theorized and described as the Dual Mandate in their imperial territories, recognizing twin responsibilities of the imperial power to develop

[52] The essence of "effective occupation" was not something entirely original. The British had used it to great effect against the Spanish and Portuguese, the elder imperial powers before the nineteenth century. During the Berlin Conference, the tables were turned on the British by the Germans and the French, who were eager to prove their imperial credentials. Geiss, "Effective Occupation", p. 270.

[53] On the Ethical Policy (or *Ethische Politiek*), see Robert Cribb, 'Development Policy in the Early 20th Century', in Jan-Paul Dirkse, Frans Hüsken and Mario Rutten (eds.), *Development and Social Welfare: Indonesia's Experiences Under the New Order* (Leiden: Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 1993), pp. 225–245, and Frances Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice In The Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, c1995), Chapter 1. See also D. H. Meijer, "Dutch Colonial Policy in Indonesia with some indication of its aims", in C. M. MacInnes (ed.), *Principles and Methods of Colonial Administration* (London: Butterworths Scientific Publications, 1950), pp. 57-69, and Ming Goovars, *Dutch Colonial Education – The Chinese Experience in Indonesia, 1900-1942*; translated by Lorre Lynn Trytten; with a foreword by Wang Gungwu (Singapore: Chinese Heritage Centre, 2005).

[54] For an overview, see Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (eds.), *The Colonial Crucible: Empire In The Making Of The Modern American State* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, c2009), Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, And Hygiene In The Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), and Julian Go and Anne L. Foster (eds.), *The American Colonial State In The Philippines: Global Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[55] For background to French imperial policy, see Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, c1997), in particular chapter 1: "The Setting: The Idea of the Civilizing Mission in 1895 and the Creation of the Government General".

its territories and its peoples, and to support the national and imperial goals of the metropole.[56]

In British Malaya, the responsibilities of the colonial administrations (of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States) increased exponentially. The Chinese Protectorate, previously limited to the jurisdiction of the Straits Settlements, was included in the administration of the Federated Malay States. A Labour Department was established in 1911 to manage the increasing numbers of South Asian laborers.[57] An Education Department had been created earlier in 1878 to organize the hitherto haphazard growth of schools to meet an increasing demand for skilled clerks.[58] Public health services were also introduced at the turn of century, as the colonial state took a keener interest in infant welfare.[59] In Singapore proper, the Municipal Commission was established in 1880 to oversee the development of Singapore town, which included managing the supply of water, electricity and gas, roads and transportation, public health and hygiene.[60] The Singapore Improvement Trust was also created in 1927 to improve the living conditions of urban dwellers.[61] Those are but snippets of the colonial state's physical expansion in Singapore and in other parts of Southeast Asia. Its expansion had several implications for historical research. One of which was the increasing number of responsibilities, and the corresponding increase in departments, institutions, legislation, and staff to manage those responsibilities. This in turn generated greater amounts of documents and records, which were duplicated in copious amounts – a

[56] As termed and described by Frederick Lugard in *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*. To some extent, Lugard was explaining what had gone on before since the late nineteenth century, rather than pointing a way forward. The publication appeared moreover during a period of reflection of the nature and purpose of colonialism.

[57] The Labour Department had roots in the "appointment in 1884 by the Straits Settlements government of an Indian Immigration Agent under the terms of the Indian Immigration Ordinance. See Norman J. Parmer, *Colonial Labor Policy and Administration: A History of Labor in The Rubber Plantation Industry in Malaya, c.1910-1941* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by J.J. Augustin, 1960), pp. 130-140 for organization of the department, and pp. 140-165 for administration of labor in British Malaya.

[58] For overview of early developments in education in the Straits Settlements, see David D. Chelliah, *A History of the Educational Policy of the Straits Settlements, With Recommendations for a New System Based on Vernaculars* (Kuala Lumpur: Printed at the Govt. Press, 1948) and H. E. Wilson, *Social Engineering in Singapore: Educational Policies and Social Change, 1819-1972* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, c1978). Subsequent publications on education in Singapore tend to focus more on post-1965 developments, such as nation-building, as well as specific issues, such as the place of Chinese vernacular schools.

[59] See Leonre Manderson, *Sickness and the State: Health and Illness in Colonial Malaya, 1870-1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Lynn Hollen Lees (2011). "Discipline and Delegation: Colonial Governance in Malayan Towns, 1880–1930", *Urban History*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (May 2011), pp. 48-64.

[60] Brenda Yeoh discusses the origins of the Municipal Board in *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore*, chapter 2. See also Khoo Kay Kim, "The Municipal Government of Singapore, 1887-1940" (Unpublished academic exercise. Dept. of History, University of Malaya, 1960), and Then Lian Mee, "The Singapore Municipality, 1946-1959 (Unpublished academic exercise. Dept. of History, University of Malaya, 1960).

[61] See Yeoh, *Contesting Space*, pp. 161-170, for the origins of the Singapore Improvement Trust.

process aided by enhancements in print and communication technology. It is no coincidence that substantive research into Singapore and Malaya's past usually begins from the late nineteenth century.[62]

The shift in approach to colonial administration was explained by John Sydenham Furnivall (1878-1960).[63] In *Colonial Policy and Practice*, Furnivall observed that colonization throughout the nineteenth century occurred more frequently through the investment of capital, in contrast to earlier colonization through human settlers.[64] He noted a change beginning in the 1870s, from the earlier *laissez faire* approach to a "new philosophy" based on efficiency and social justice.[65] This was not a total disavowal of earlier Liberal beliefs that "economic progress was a sufficient guarantee of general welfare, both material and welfare".[66] But rather that Liberal doctrine, from then on, included a "double strand combining the practical common sense of Adam Smith and [Jeremy] Bentham with the humanitarian ideals of Rousseau and the French Revolution".[67] Furnivall suggested a variety of factors for the change. Those ranged from epochal moments in world history, such as the opening of the Suez Canal in late 1869, demands for greater state intervention for economic purposes, and a growing awareness of social injustice, most of which drove social movements in the metropole during the late nineteenth century.[68] The new philosophy gave rise to the "new imperialism", particularly in the "struggle for Africa" and "jockeying" for a piece of China. Furnivall suggested the race for imperial territory, and subsequently, the need

[62] For instance, Yeoh's *Contesting Space* is based primarily in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. James Warren began his study of rickshaw coolies and prostitutes in the 1880 and 1870 respectively,
[63] Furnivall was a former colonial official in the Indian Civil Service. He worked in Burma from 1902 until his retirement in 1931. He studied in Leiden University from 1933 to 1935, researching colonial policy and administrations in British Burma and the Dutch East Indies. Representative publications include *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press. First edition published in 1948, second edition in 1956), *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy* / with an introduction by A. C. D. de Graeff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, first edition published in 1939; second edition in 1967), and *The Fashioning of Leviathan* (Rangoon: Zabu Meitswe Pitaka Press, 1939; originally published in *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, pp. 1-138).
[64] Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, p. 1. "Colonization originally implied settlement, but the tropics have been colonized with capital rather than with men, and most tropical countries under foreign rule are dependencies rather than colonies, though in practice both terms are used indifferently".
[65] Furnivall organized the administration of British Burma into the following periods: laissez-faire (1826-1870), efficiency and social justice (1870-1923), and political democracy (1923-1940). The Netherlands India's administration was defined mainly via the Culture (1830-1870), Liberal (1870-1900), and Ethical (1900 onwards) systems, with the final system ushering in the beginnings of political democracy.
[66] Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, p. 28.
[67] Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, p. 62. For a narrative of the major social and economic philosophers, see Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (New York: Knopf, 1984).
[68] Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 62-63. He explained the new philosophy as the result of "[Charles] Darwin's principle of the survival of the fittest it derived a justification of efficiency, and, from St-Simon, Robert Owen and other Socialists of various schools, the doctrine of social justice". (p. 62).

for effective administration, were moderated by a sense of social justice. All of which resulted in paternalistic rationalizations of colonial rule, such as the "White Man's Burden", so as to promote "the general welfare of the world and of their tropical subjects".[69]

Furnivall's observations were formed through years of service in the Indian Civil Service, and then further developed as a student of colonial administration in Leiden University between 1933 and 1935. His views were not unique. The interwar years were a time of "growing interest in the welfare and development of the population of colonies, protectorates and mandates...."[70] In 1931, Arnold Dirk Adriaan de Kat Angelino, an official in the Dutch East Indies government, made similar rationalizations for colonial rule.[71] Examining the development of colonial policy, Kat Angelino noted that there had been a shift from the "White Man's Burden" to a "Universal Human Task".[72] He suggested a form of synthesis between the values of "East and West", based primarily on "human kinship", a sense of solidarity within humankind. The end-goal of colonial policy should never be a suppression or destruction of the "soul of the East", but rather paternalistically, to "widen its horizons" by applying lessons learned from Western modernization and science. On the eve of the Second World War, the nature of British imperialism, which had been shifting ever so gradually since the late nineteenth century, was one or two crises away from a decisive change in policy.

The Global Quest for Social Security

Simultaneous developments in the metropole and elsewhere in the British Empire were just as impactful, albeit in a less direct fashion. The new colonial policy was affected by metropolitan responses to poverty and other social ills, and more broadly, the global quest for

[69] Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, p. 62. He referenced directly the main title of Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem. He explained those aspects of colonial rule, such as efficient administration and social justice, as finding "expression in British policy as the doctrine of 'the White Man's Burden'". This is an interesting appropriation of Kipling's poem, published partly to commemorate American intervention in Spanish Philippines. At best, Furnivall's observations should be taken as those made by a former colonial official with continued interest in the integrity of the British Empire, especially after 1945. For historical narrative of British social thought in the latter nineteenth century, see Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Social Ethic of the Late Victorians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

[70] Arnold Dirk Adriaan de Kat Angelino, *Colonial Policy – Volume One: General Principles* / abridged translation from the Dutch by G. J. Renier in collaboration with the author (The Hague: M. Nijhoff; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), p. 1.

[71] De Kat Angelino was a Leiden-trained sinologist who worked closely with the government of the Dutch East Indies. The first volume is entitled *General Principles*, the second *Dutch East Indies*. Publication was written for or as part of a conference organized by the Institute of Pacific Relations in 1931.

[72] DE Kat Angelino, *Colonial Policy – Volume One: General Principles*, see Chapter II: Call to Leadership.

social security. Social security in this study refers to the social policies and services that offer protection against certain life contingencies, usually a social insurance scheme.[73] Those in turn were affected by several historical factors, namely the immediacy of crisis moments, such as economic slumps and wars, and the longer-term effects of industrialization and urbanization on perceptions of poverty and social needs.

The original social security measures were introduced primarily in response to the fallout of war, economic slumps, and from those, the potential threat of social unrest. For instance, pensions and disability benefits were provided to the survivors and the dependents of war victims of the American Civil War.[74] In Europe, the earliest state-wide social security schemes emerged in Imperial Germany. Between 1883 and 1887, Bismarck introduced social security legislation in a bid to outflank the social democratic movement. Social security took the form of social insurance for sickness and accidents, and pensions for old age and disability.[75] Bismarck's social legislation was a fundamental break "from the old system of poor relief to future pension rights backed by a legal entitlement, from voluntariness to compulsory participation, from the communal to the Reich level".[76] German legislation became the basis of social security in continental Europe. It was copied wholesale in Denmark, Belgium and Switzerland, and inspired Austrian and Scandinavian versions of social security.[77] By 1900, most Western European countries had legislated for some form of social insurance, usually for industrial accidents and health, and pensions for old age.[78]

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[73] An adaptation of the definition given by the International Labour Organization: "A society that provides security for its citizens protects them not only from war and disease, but also from the insecurities related to making a living through work. Social security systems provide for basic income in cases of unemployment, illness and injury, old age and retirement, invalidity, family responsibilities such as pregnancy and childcare, and loss of the family breadwinner. Such benefits are important not only for individual workers and their families but also for their communities as a whole". Taken from *International Labour Standards on Social Security*, http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/social-security/lang--en/index.htm. Accessed 6 July 2016.

[74] Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in The United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992). Skocpol suggests that the 1932 New Deal was not the beginning of social provision from the federal level, but rather another one in a historical process that began after the American Civil War.

[75] Michael Stolleis, *Origins of The German Welfare State: Social Policy in Germany to 1945*; translated from the German by Thomas Dunlap (Berlin; New York: Springer, c2013), pp. 50-51, 73. Sickness insurance was financed principally by employer and employee contributions, while accident insurance and pensions for old age and disability were financed by employer contributions and state subsidies.

[76] Bismarck's Imperial Message of 17 November 1881 expounded further: "{T]hat the healing of the social harms will have to be sought not exclusively through the repression of social-democratic excesses, but equally so through the positive promotion of the welfare of the workers". Quoted in Stolleis, *Origins of the German Welfare State*, p. 55

[77] Asa Briggs, "The Welfare State in Historical Perspective", *European Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1961), pp. 246-247; and Hennock, *British Social Reform and German Precedents*, pp. 126-151.

[78] Pierson, "Origins and Development of the Welfare State, 1880-1975", see pp. 52-53 for tables.

Britain soon followed. Between 1905 and 1914, the Liberal Government led by Herbert Asquith and David Lloyd George, introduced state pensions for old age, and insurance for sickness and unemployment – all of which laid the foundations of the postwar welfare state in Britain.[79] Across the Atlantic, the Great Depression similarly paved the way for American social security. In 1935, Franklin Roosevelt pushed through his "New Deal", a social insurance scheme that provided old age pensions, grants to states for dependent children, maternal and child welfare, and unemployment compensation.[80] The quest for social security also became international in 1944, when the International Labour Organization declared social security to be part of its aims and purposes.[81]

The imperial side of the social security story is lesser known but no less significant. For one, the Empire actually stole a march on the metropole. In 1898, New Zealand, at that time a self-governing colony, was the first in the British Empire to provide old age pensions. They were funded primarily by taxation, and provided "to people of good character, but with little or no means, above the age of sixty-five".[82] This was followed by the colonies of New South Wales and Victoria in 1901. In 1908, the Commonwealth of Australia, by then a Dominion of the British Empire, introduced federal legislation to provide in all states pensions for old age, the blind and permanently disabled.[83] In 1938, New Zealand, by then a Dominion, led the way again by introducing the world's first comprehensive Social Security Act. Unifying existing social security schemes, the Labour Government put into place a

[79] See for an overview, Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 159-192 for introduction and implementation of Liberal social policy between 1905 and 1914 (pp. 193-202) for social policy during and after World War I.
[80] The scheme was funded by payroll tax and contributions from employers. The full text of the 1935 Social Security Act is available online. The official website for the US Social Security Administration also gives an introductory overview of social security in the United States and the world in general. URL: https://www.ssa.gov/history/. Accessed 13 June 2016.
[81] This was known as the Declaration of Philadelphia. The relevant clause, Clause (f) of Part III, reads: "The Conference recognizes the solemn obligation of the International Labour Organization to further among the nations of the world programmes which will achieve, the extension of social security measures to provide a basic income to all in need of such protection and comprehensive medical care". Full text available online at Key Document – ILO Constitution. http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:62:0::NO:62:P62_LIST_ENTRIE_ID:2453907:NO#declaration. Accessed 13 June 2016. See also Jeremy Seekings, "The ILO and Welfare Reforms in South Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean", in Jasmien Van Daele, Magaly Rodríguez García, Geert Van Goethem, Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *ILO Histories: Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World During the Twentieth Century* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 140.
[82] Briggs, "The Welfare State in Historical Perspective", p. 243. For overview and analysis of the old age pensions scheme, see David Thomson, *A World Without Welfare: New Zealand's Colonial Experiment* (Auckland: Auckland University Press with Bridget William Books, 1998), pp. 154-165.
[83] Briggs, "The Welfare State in Historical Perspective", p. 244. For historical overviews of social security systems in British territory, see Ronald Mendelsohn, *Social Security in the British Commonwealth* (University of London: The Athlone Press, 1954). See also New Zealand Social Security Department, with the co-operation of the Health Department, *The Growth and Development of Social Security in New Zealand (A Survey of Social Security in New Zealand from 1898 to 1949)* (Wellington, New Zealand, 1950).

"grand framework", which provided benefits for "Disabilities arising from Age, Sickness, Widowhood, Orphanhood, Unemployment…."[84]

Societal Pressures

Social security legislation came about from substantial societal pressures, which were responses to the social ills of industrialization, capitalism, and urbanization. The latter part of the nineteenth century witnessed a series of economic crises that rocked the industrial societies of Europe and the United States.[85] In response, various intellectual thoughts and social movements emerged, such as Marxism, Communism, Socialism, which also saw the entry into politics of workers, women, and others fighting for the vulnerable. In England, the economic slumps led to a middle-class "rediscovery" of poverty.[86] The massive scale of unemployment as a result of sustained economic depression forced a reexamination of earlier assumptions of poverty. The impact was moreover not limited to the individual worker. Unemployment also exerted pressure on older forms of social protection and security. Family and communal institutions, such as trade guilds and mutual aid organization, were weakened by industrialization and urbanization over the nineteenth century.[87] From the late nineteenth century, poverty was no longer thought to be caused by individual indolence or an accepted part of life.[88] This played out, throughout the late Victorian period and into the new century, in the form of literary publications, scientific surveys, worker and other social movements,

[84] Mendelsohn, *Social Security in the British Commonwealth*, p. 182. For a comparison with the American social security system introduced in 1935, see Raymond Richards, *Closing the Door to Destitution: The Shaping of the Social Security Acts of the United States and New Zealand* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

[85] It was known as the Great Depression until the 1930s slump took over the moniker. The late nineteenth century slump is also known as the Long Depression, referencing the series of successive "panics" that occurred. See Hans Rosenberg, "Political and Social Consequences of the Great Depression of 1873-1896 in Central Europe". *The Economic History Review*. Vol. 13, Issue 1/2, 1943, pp. 58–73, and A. E. Musson, "The Great Depression in Britain, 1873-1896: A Reappraisal". *The Journal of Economic History*. Vol. 19, Issue 2, 1959, pp. 199–228. For a more narrative account, see Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, pp. 68-75, and Fraser, *British Welfare State:* pp. 144-145.

[86] Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 144-147. Himmelfarb referenced E. P. Thompson's observation (in *The Making of the English Working Class*) of a gap between the 1849 publication of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, and the 1889 publication of Charles Booth first volume of *Life and Labour of the People in London*. See *Poverty and Compassion*, pp. 10-11 and fn. 24.

[87] Stolleis, *Origins of the German Welfare State*, pp. 50-51. See also Greg Eghigian, *Making Security Social: Disability, Insurance, and The Birth of the Social Entitlement State in Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, c2000), pp. 25-66.

[88] Bronislaw Geremek discusses the assumptions about poverty and their implications on policy, scholarship, and public response in his introduction to *Poverty: A History*, translated by Agnieszka Kolakowska (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 1-14.

the formation of new organizations with political ambitions, and legislation for social security.[89]

Awareness of persistent poverty in England was moreover given a scientific basis, namely through the social surveys conducted by Charles Booth and Seebohn Rowntree.[90] Poverty now could be quantified, calculated as a poverty line, and therefore, theoretically at least, eradicated in an objective fashion. Approaching poverty through objective and scientific methods further buttressed a healthy self-belief that something should and could be done about eliminating poverty.[91] The Charity Organisation Society was founded in 1869 as a response to the messy proliferation of philanthropic organizations since the mid-nineteenth century. To tackle the perceived inefficient wasteful manner of tackling poverty, the society carried out several initiatives, including an Enquiry Department to "conduct investigations and collect information", a system of "visitors" (based on clergy practices of visiting the poor with food and clothing), and a "School of Sociology". Those innovations in approaches to poverty laid the foundations for the present-day casework system.[92]

Other social reform movements also emerged during the period of economic slumps. Toynbee Hall was founded in 1884 in the East End of London, an initiative that sought to bring together the rich and the poor to live together in a settlement house.[93] Octavia Hill, a founder of the Charity Organisation Society, initiated a settlement movement to provide low-

[89] Himmelfarb gives an extremely accessible history of these developments in Britain in *The Idea of Poverty* and *Poverty and Compassion*. For a more analytical approach to American and European social security systems, see Michael B. Katz, *In The Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, c1986), Daniel Levine, *Poverty and Society: The Growth of the American Welfare State in International Comparison* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, c1988), E. P. Hennock, *British Social Reform And German Precedents: The Case Of Social Insurance, 1880-1914* (Oxford [Oxfordshire]: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), E. P. Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850–1914: Social Policies Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, *European Foundations Of The Welfare State*; translated from the German by John Veit-Wilson; with the assistance of Thomas Skelton-Robinson (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), Eghigian, *Making Security Social*, Stolleis, *Origins of The German Welfare State*.

[90] Charles Booth conducted a massive social investigation of London life. It was divided into three sections on poverty, industry and religious influences, and spanned almost two decades (1886-1903). It was published as the multi-volume *Life and Labour of the People in London*, the first volume appearing in 1889. Seebohn Rowntree conducted a more concise social survey of York, published in 1901 as *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*. See Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp.144-150. See also Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, pp. 79-178, for a historical overview of the work done by both men.

[91] Himmelfarb attributed this to the strong belief in the value of the scientific method and the use of statistics to measure standards and progress. See *Poverty and Compassion*, pp. 21-30. See also Howard Glennerster, John Hills, David Piachaud, and Jo Webb, *One Hundred Years of Poverty and Policy* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, U.K., 2004), pp. 18-26.

[92] Himmelfarb commented that while these were not original initiatives, the COS was the first to aggressively publicize and increased awareness of such works. See Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, pp. 192, 194-196. See also Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp.142-144.

[93] Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, pp. 236-143.

cost and clean housing for the poor.[94] This movement went beyond British shores. It also inspired the establishment of Hull House in Chicago by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr in 1889.[95] The Salvation Army was another movement that went abroad and eventually reached Singapore in 1935. It was originally established as the East London Christian Mission in the East End of London, England in 1865. The mission was founded by a Methodist minister, William Booth, as a response to the perceived exclusivity of established churches to only the upper strata of society. Booth took his message to the streets to provide a church for the "poor, the homeless, the hungry, and the destitute". In 1878, the mission was renamed the Salvation Army.[96] Initially an all-inclusive evangelical mission, the Salvation Army from 1890 also initiated social service programs to complement its evangelical wing, such as the establishment of "rescue homes", "slum out-posts", job-creation, and food relief.[97]

There was an unmistakable socialist tinge in such public movements and calls for social reform. Social action moreover had political implications. In 1884, the Fabian Society was created, and drew together a varied mix of personalities, from academics to civil servants to politicians, from trade unionists to social activists to public intellectuals.[98] The society was partly responsible for the formation of the British Labour Party. Originally known as the Labour Representation Committee, the political party was the result of attempts to coordinate the growing numbers of socialist groups, and sustained workers' movements and socialist thought in the late nineteenth century.[99] The Labour Party would only form the British government in 1924.[100] But the social and political pressures that created the political party made their presence felt early on. They pressured the Liberal Party, one of Britain's oldest political parties, to adapt to prevailing circumstances and to introduce old-age pensions and social insurance.[101] Just as how the authoritarian figure of Bismarck may not immediately be

[94] Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, pp. 210-218.
[95] Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, p. 241.
[96] Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, pp. 219-230. For a detailed examination of the organization's origins, see Pamela J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, [Calif.]; London: University of California Press, c2001).
[97] Walker, *The Salvation Army*, pp. 1-2, 236-240.
[98] For overview of Fabianism in the late nineteenth century, see Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, pp. 350-378. See also Edward R. Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society* (London: Frank Cass & Co., first published in 1916).
[99] See for a brief overview of origins of the Labour Party, Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 150-158.
[100] For overview of social policy of the first British Labour government (1924 to 1931), especially in tackling unemployment, see Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 202-226.
[101] Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 161-168, and Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, pp. 375-380. Fraser makes the point that the Liberals, before 1909, had to be prodded along by Labour back-benchers (p. 161); but by the second decade of the twentieth century, some Liberals had fully embraced New Liberals. Winston Churchill, then President of the Board of Trade, was quoted as saying: "Socialism wants to pull down wealth, Liberalism seeks to raise up poverty…. Socialism assails the maximum pre-eminence of the individual –

associated with the origins of the welfare state, those measures were pushed through by a political party not usually associated with deliberate state intervention. But the New or Constructive Liberalism of the Liberal Party in the early twentieth century was different from its predecessors' classic Liberalism, which upheld the traditions of personal liberty, *laissez-faire* economics, and minimal government intervention.[102] New Liberalism retained the emphasis on personal liberty but also acknowledged state responsibility to remove obstacles to "social capacity, such as those arising from lack of education, poor health and bad housing".[103] Even before social insurance, the Liberal Government had provided free school meals, easier access to secondary education, and probation services for juveniles as an alternative to prison.[104]

From the vantage point of world history, what happened in England was part of a shift in the status quo when compared with other industrialized societies. On the eve of the Second World War, the metropole and industrial societies elsewhere in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States had established a track record of state intervention to address needs arising from various social contingencies. These mainly took the form of social insurance, which espoused the principles of self- and shared responsibilities between the individual and the state. The assumption of state responsibility for some of life's social contingencies had also stuck, as seen in the tax-funded pension schemes for old age and disabilities.

War and the Beveridge Plan

War was simultaneously a catalyst for changes to social policy and a reinforcement of prevailing approaches to governance and society. On a basic level, as seen in the benefits paid out to American Civil War veterans and dependents, a minimum level of care is needed.[105] On

Liberalism seeks to build up minimum the minimum standard of the masses. Socialism attacks capital, Liberalism attacks monopoly". (p. 178).

[102] The Liberal Party grew out of the former Whig Party during the 1850s. It formed the government several times throughout the nineteenth century, most famously by William Gladstone. The social legislation was passed by the Liberal Government led by Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith, and supported by David Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the Exchequer (who was assisted by Winston Churchill). See Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 159-192, for overview of Liberal social policy between 1905 and 1914.

[103] T. H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Organization* (1895 edn.), pp. 206-209. Quoted in Briggs, "The Welfare State in Historical Perspective", p. 245. Briggs cited Green as a primary intellectual influence for the change in Liberal thought.

[104] Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 161-164.

[105] See Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in The United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992). Skocpol also suggests that the

another level, war also necessitated a more centralized approach so as to better harness resources for victory. For instance, the poor physical conditions of recruits to fight the Boer War forced the British to reexamine existing health measures and nutrition policy. During the First World War, the British government realized that fighting a war on a global scale could not be done without some level of central planning and coordination, and the support of home and colonial society.[106]

The totality of the Second World War (and the reach of German bombers) swept aside any residual *laissez faire* and liberal pretensions in the metropole, as food rationing and evacuations necessitated greater state involvement in society.[107] The firsthand experiences of near-defeat and despair also spurred an economist William Beveridge to conceptualize a grand vision of social justice and social security in return for wartime sacrifices.[108] This was published in December 1942 as *Social Insurance and Allied Services*.[109] The Beveridge Plan, as it was popularly known, was "part legislative proposal, part visionary philosophy".[110] The 543-page report was extremely well-received for a government-commissioned report.[111] In laying out a plan for postwar reconstruction, the Beveridge Plan presumptuously assumed eventual victory (as it was unclear at that point how the war would develop). They were presented in uncomplicated terms. Beveridge called for a "scheme of social insurance against interruption and destruction of earning power and for special expenditure arising at birth, marriage or death". Simply put, an "assurance of a certain income" during life contingencies.[112] The scheme was to be universal, covering all citizens without discrimination. Pensions and allowances, funded from taxation, were to be given to the elderly and children below working age. A social insurance scheme, funded by contributions

1932 New Deal was not the beginning of social provision from the federal level, but rather another one in a process that began after the American Civil War.

[106] The low physical and nutritional standards of British soldiers "strengthened the hand of health reformers" to create a Ministry of Health. See Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 195-196. The First World War was also a catalyst for political reforms in India, or at least raised the hopes and aspirations of Indian nationalists in return for their contributions and support during the war.

[107] Richard Titmuss expounded on wartime social policy, namely food rationing, evacuation, and healthcare, in *Problems of Social Policy* (London: H.M.S.O.: Longmans, Green, 1950). This publication was part of the British government's official history of the Second World War.

[108] See for instance, Elizabeth Thompson, "The Climax and Crisis of the Colonial Welfare State in Syria and Lebanon during World War II", in Steven Heydemann (ed.), *War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c2000), pp. 59-99. See also Fraser, *British Welfare State*, Chapter 8; Geoffrey Finlayson, *Citizen, State, and Social Welfare in Britain – 1830-1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), chapter 3, and Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, Introduction.

[109] William Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (London: H.M.S.O., 1942).

[110] Baldwin, "Beveridge in the Longue Duree", p. 39.

[111] The report sold "some half a million copies: quite unprecedented for a technical government publication…. About fifty thousand copies sold in the United States". Abel-Smith, "The Beveridge Report", p. 18.

[112] *Social Insurance*, pp. 9 and 153.

from employer and employees, and administered by the government, would cover workers in times of need, such as unemployment, disability (injury), sickness, maternity, and death (benefits for dependents). In addition, a comprehensive national health service was to be constituted to provide medical treatment and rehabilitative services for all citizens.[113]

Beveridge's plan was not universally accepted, and encountered opposition from Churchill's War Cabinet and from non-governmental interest groups.[114] Nonetheless, public opinion was on Beveridge's side.[115] In 1944, the War Cabinet published several White Papers on social policy, and a Ministry of National Insurance was created in anticipation of upcoming changes.[116] Between 1945 and 1948, the Labour Government passed four pieces of legislation that formed the structural core of what came to be known as the welfare state.[117] They were the Family Allowance Act, the National Insurance Act, the Industrial Injuries Act, and the National Assistance Act. They were supported further by a National Health Service Act (1946) that provided for free medical services financed primarily out of taxation. All social security measures were operational from 5 July 1948, also known as the appointed

[113] Beveridge's plan hinged on three assumptions: children's allowances, comprehensive health and rehabilitative services, and full employment. (*Social Insurance*, pp. 153-165). These three assumptions were the primary cause of tensions between him and the Treasury, which balked at the potential cost of administering the scheme. See Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 241-242, Addison, *The Road to 1945*, pp. 216-228, and Paul Bridgen, "A Straitjacket with Wriggle Room: The Beveridge Report, the Treasury and the Exchequer's Pension Liability, 1942-59"', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (2005; 2006), pp. 1-25.

[114] The report was supposed to have been signed off by the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services, of which Beveridge was Chairman. But in January 1942, Beveridge was informed that the committee members were to be regarded as "advisers and assessors", and that the report, "when made, will be your own report; it will be signed by you alone…." Social Insurance, p. 2. See also Fraser, *British Welfare State*, p. 235; José Harris, *William Beveridge: A Biography* (Oxford, England; New York: Clarendon Press, c1997; rev. ed.), and Brian Abel-Smith, "The Beveridge Report: Its Origins and Outcomes", in Hills, Dutch, and Glennester, *Beveridge and Social Security*, p. 15.

[115] When the report was published in December 1942, it appeared as if a corner had been turned in the war. By the end of 1942, Britain had survived the Battle of Britain, and the United States and the Soviet Union had entered the war as allies. The report moreover came after the British won a major victory – its first land victory – over the Germans in El Alamein, Egypt. See also Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British politics and the Second World War* (London: Cape, 1975), pp. 217-218; and Harris, *William Beveridge*, in particular chapter "Aftermath of the Beveridge Report".

[116] Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 242-245. The White Papers were on A National Health Service, Employment Policy, Social Insurance, and Educational Reconstruction.

[117] Earlier use of "welfare state" referred to it as a type of state, as opposed to "Power States" exemplified by authoritarian regimes in interwar Europe. See for a genealogy of the term, Klaus Petersen and Jørn Henrik Petersen, "Confusion and divergence: origins and meanings of the term 'welfare state' in Germany and Britain, 1840–1940". *Journal of European Social Policy*. Vol. 23, No. 1, (2013), p. 47. Daniel Wincott traced the first postwar use of the term to a 2 November 1946 article in *The Times*, where it had been used to in the context of the mid-term elections in the United States. *The Times*' Washington Correspondent was commenting on how the Republicans associated "extra-governmental functions" with the "ongoing creation of a "welfare" state, a process to which the first two years of Woodrow Wilson and the pre-war years of Franklin Roosevelt powerfully contributed". Daniel Wincott, "Original and imitated or elusive and limited? Towards a genealogy of the welfare state idea in Britain", in Daniel Béland and Klaus Petersen (eds.), *Analysing Social Policy Concepts and Language: Comparative and Transnational Perspectives* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2014), pp. 135-136.

day.[118] The Beveridge Plan can be understood as one end-point of state and societal responses to social needs in industrial and urban societies. Beveridge's plan was less revolutionary than it might have appeared to be during wartime. His plan was essentially a consolidation of state-administered social insurance that had been introduced earlier in the twentieth century.[119] These schemes evolved over time, but the principles of state and societal responsibility persisted, specifically the responsibility for unavoidable social contingencies and the idea of self-responsibility through payment of insurance contributions.

A New Policy: The Colonial Development and Welfare Act, 1940

The formulation of colonial policy in London was not insulated from metropolitan circumstances. Again, imperial developments predated and anticipated metropolitan policy. Two years before the Beveridge Plan was announced, the Colonial Office introduced a new policy of development and welfare for the empire. The immediate catalyst came from emerging social tensions in the British Empire, brought about by the 1930s Great Depression, and the exacerbation of imperial anxieties by a looming war. Throughout the 1930s, British territories in the West Indies and Africa experienced sustained labor and social unrest.[120] The 1937 and 1938 riots in the West Indies provoked severe criticism back in England. A Royal Commission formed to determine the causes of the unrest completed its report in 1939.[121] The commission's findings were so damning that the report was not published in its entirety until 1945.[122] Still, in the midst of a war that partly questioned their competence to rule an empire, the British dared not stay idle.

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[118] Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 245-264. "Appointed Day" reference on page 262.
[119] Addison, *The Road to 1945*, p. 213. For reconsideration of Beveridge's legacy, see Hills, Dutch and Glennester (eds.), *Beveridge and Social Security*, chapters 4 to 8.
[120] See John Harrison, "The Colonial Legacy and Social Policy in the British Caribbean", in James Midgley and David Piachaud (eds.), *Colonialism and Welfare: Social Policy and the British Imperial Legacy* (Cheltenham, U.K.; Northampton, Mass.: Edward Elgar, c2011), and Michael Ashley Havinden and David Meredith, *Colonialism and Development: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1850-1960* (New York; London; Routledge, 1993), pp. 194-196.
[121] Havinden and Meredith, *Colonialism and Development*, pp. 197-198.
[122] "The social services in the West Indies are all far from adequate for the needs of the population, partly as a result of defects of policy, and largely through the paucity of the funds at the disposal of the Colonial Governments which are in the main necessarily responsible for these services… The diets of the poorer people are often insufficient and usually ill-balanced, although nutritious foods of all kinds necessary for health can be produced without much difficult in almost every West Indian Colony…. The reason for this appears to lie fundamentally in the divorce of the people from the land without the provision of compensatory arrangements which would help to ensure adequate food supplies for the dis-placed population…. Housing is generally deplorable, and sanitation primitive in the extreme". Portion of conclusions quoted in Havinden and Meredith, *Colonialism and Development*, p. 198.

The British parliament debated the Colonial Development and Welfare bill in the summer of 1940. In July, the bill became law after receiving the royal assent.[123] The Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 adjusted existing policy, from one of colony self-sufficiency to a "forward policy" of centralized planning and metropolitan aid.[124] The Act originally set aside £55,000,000 for development projects in the colonial territories and social research. The amount was to be spent over ten years, capped at an annual maximum of £5,000,000 for developmental projects, and £500,000 per year for social research.[125] The monies were intended for capital and recurrent expenditure for projects to develop the economy of the colonies and to provide a basic level of social services for its peoples. Those included works "such as irrigation, agricultural development works, and similar works of economic development which will increase productivity". The object was still to "develop the Colonies so that as far as possible they become self-supporting units", but at the same time, "their citizens must enjoy a proper standard of social services, and we shall count as qualifying for assistance … every part of the health and medical activities and every part of the educational activities of a colonial Government".[126]

The Act was a statement from the metropole accepting responsibility for the welfare of the colonies. Malcolm MacDonald,[127] the Act's chief architect during his tenure as Secretary of State for the Colonies (1938 to 1940), invoked the bill's significance:

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[123] See House of Lords Debates (HL Deb), 20 March 1940, vol. 115 cc970-1017, House of Commons Debates (HC Deb), 21 May 1940, vol. 361 cc41-125, HL Deb, 2 July 1940, vol. 116 cc723-48, and HC Deb, 17 July 1940, vol. 363 c238. See also J. M. Lee and Martin Petter, *The Colonial Office, War, and Development Policy: Organisation and the Planning of a Metropolitan Initiative, 1939-1945* (London: Published for the Institute of Commonwealth Studies by M.T. Smith, 1982. Vol. 22).

[124] The White Paper was reported in Singapore. See *The Straits Times*, 21 February 1940, "£5,000,000 Annually for Colonial Empire", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 21 February 1940, "Colonial Policy", and *The Straits Times*, 7 May 1940, "£11,000,000 in Loans for Colonial Empire". It was also reported by the *Malaya Tribune*, which took a contrary view, noting the Act did not provide for political reform. (See 21, 22, and 24 February 1940).

[125] The Colonial Development and Welfare Act was amended in 1945, 1949, 1950, and 1955, primarily to increase the amount of grants available. It was then consolidated in 1959, with further amendments in 1963 and 1965. The Act was renamed the Overseas Development and Service Act in 1965, and then the Overseas Aid Act in 1966. See for an overview Great Britain Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Colonial Development and Welfare Acts, 1929-70: a brief review* (London: H.M.S.O., 1971). Earlier official reviews were also published: Roy Lewis, *Colonial development and welfare, 1946 to 55* (London: H.M.S.O, 1956), and Great Britain Central Office of Information Reference Division, *The United Kingdom Colonial Development and Welfare Acts* (London: Gt. Brit. Central Office of Information. Reference Division, 1960).

[126] HC Deb, 21 May 1940, vol. 361 cc46. The French introduced a similar policy after the war in 1946, the *Fond d'Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social*. Cited in Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c2005), p. 37. See, for French responses to labor unrest in French Africa in 1930s, Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 73-107.

[127] Son of Britain's first Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, Malcolm MacDonald (1901-1981) had an intimate connection to Singapore, Malaya, and Southeast Asia as a region. His cabinet appointments included was Secretary for State for the Colonies from May 1938 to May 1940 for Neville Chamberlain's government

> At this critical hour let the world mark the passage of the Colonial Development and Welfare Bill through the British Parliament as a sign of our faith in ultimate victory. This nation will pass triumphantly through its present ordeal…. When the enemy is worsted and the war is finished, Britain will still exercise vast responsibilities for the government of Colonial peoples. In the meantime we must not default upon our Colonial obligations, we must not let slip the experienced skill of our guiding hand; we must still, even now, have a constant care to protect and to promote the well-being of our fellow subjects in the Empire overseas…. [T]he Bill which we are discussing this afternoon breaks new ground. It establishes the duty of taxpayers in this country to contribute directly and for its own sake towards the development in the widest sense of the word of the colonial peoples for whose good government the taxpayers of this country are ultimately responsible.[128]

In terms of actual grants, Singapore did not draw as much as other imperial territories in Africa or the West Indies.[129] The impact for Singapore was subtler. The assumption of imperial responsibility changed the approach to colonial administration. The prewar *laissez faire* approach must be discarded, driven by a sense that the colonial state could and should do more for society than it did before. Any reservations in the British metropole about state intervention in the dependent colonies were, at least in principle, swept away by the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act. Centralized planning from the metropole was needed to effect changes for a better postwar future, and the Colonial Office was reorganized to meet new obligations.[130]

Wartime circumstances further reinforced the new approach. Of note was the pressure exerted by the Americans on the British regarding the latter's imperial possessions. This was

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and Minister for Health (1940-1941) for Winston Churchill's National Government. After the war, he was Governor-General of Malaya (1946-1948), and later Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia (1948-1955). Concurrently, MacDonald was also Chancellor of the University of Malaya (1949-1961). See for a biographical study Clyde Sanger, *Malcolm MacDonald: Bringing an End to Empire* (New York: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

[128] My emphasis. HC Deb, 21 May 1940, vol. 361 cc41-42, 45. The significance of the last sentence was taken up by Arthur Creech Jones, a member of the Opposition and a future Secretary of State of the Colonies for the postwar Labour Government: "This Bill marks…the ending of the laisser [sic] faire attitude towards Colonial development and, I hope, the end of platitudinous talk about trusteeship…. [I]t is economic development which in the long run makes possible social services and welfare, and the ability of the Colonial peoples to stand on their own feet".

[129] The bulk of financial aid went to West Indian and African territories. Overall, roads, education, and health received the most attention and aid. In total, Singapore received £2,122,000 in grants and loans between 1946 and 1970, the bulk of which went to building an airport in Paya Lebar. Singapore did also benefit from sharing the original University of Malaya with the Federation of Malaya. For a full listing of grants and loans, see Table 1 in *Colonial Development and Welfare Acts, 1929-70: A Brief Review*.

[130] Martin and Petter, *Colonial Office at War*, pp. 38-46. Then Prime Minister Winston Churchill described the event as the "worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history". For an overview of the Malayan campaign, see B. P. Farrell, *The Defence and Fall of Singapore 1940-1942* (Singapore: Monsoon Books Pte. Ltd., 2015), and Noel Barber, *Sinister Twilight: The Fall of Singapore* (London: Cassell, 2002).

spelled out in third clause of 1941 Atlantic Charter, which indicated that the Americans and the British would "respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live…."[131] This clause was interpreted as a repudiation of the British Empire, and gave the Colonial Office and the British government additional incentive to reexamine existing principles of colonial administration.[132] The manner in which British Singapore surrendered to the Japanese in February 1942 exacerbated existing imperial insecurities.[133] Britain's "worst disaster" only increased public awareness of earlier colonial ambivalence towards their "tropical East Ends" (a reference to the poorer areas in London). As the Japanese military swept the rest of Southeast Asia and threatened British India, earlier warnings of the inherent weaknesses (and loyalties) of colonial plural societies, seemed to have come true.[134]

Furnivall had introduced the plural society concept during the interwar years.[135] He described the scene:

> [T]he first thing that strikes the visitor is the medley of peoples – European, Chinese, Indian and native. It is in the strictest sense a medley, for they mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market-place, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. Even in the economic sphere there is a division of labour along racial line.[136]

[131] The full clause reads: "[T]hey respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them…."

[132] The reaction of the Colonial Office to the Atlantic Charter is discussed in Martin and Petter, *Colonial Office at War*, pp. 117-143. Responses culminated in a statement of colonial policy in 1943: "We are pledged to guide Colonial people along the road to self-government within the framework of the British Empire. We are pledged to build up their social and economic institutions, and we are pledged to develop their natural resources … The central purpose of our Colonial administration has often been proclaimed. It has been called the doctrine of trusteeship, although I think some of us feel now that that word "trustee" is rather too static in its connotation and that we should prefer to combine with the status of trustee the position also of partner". HC Deb 13 July 1943 vol. 391 cc47-151. See also Martin and Petter, *Colonial Office at War*, pp. 147-163.

[133] Martin and Petter, *Colonial Office at War*, pp. 121-127.

[134] See Joanna Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War & Welfare in Kenya 1925-52* (Oxford: James Currey; Nairobi: E.A.E.P.; Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000). p. 94. Lewis cites articles by Margery Perham, a British historian specializing in colonial administration and African studies. Perham's articles and essays are collected in Mary Bull and Alison Smith (eds.), *Margery Perham and British Rule in Africa* (Great Britain: Frank Cass, 1991).

[135] First introduced in *Netherlands India*. See in particular Chapter XIII, pp. 446-470. It was "a society ... comprising two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit". (p. 446).

[136] Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 304-305.

Furnivall saw the plural society in the Federated Malay States as the "obvious and outstanding" result of contact, where the indigenous population was barely a quarter of total population in the wake of sustained immigration of labor.[137] Compared to other societies that supposedly possessed common traditions seen in Canada, the United States, or Australia, the plural society had "no common social will to set a bar to immigration, which has been left to the play of economic forces".[138]

The concept of a common social appeared consistently in Furnivall's discourse and studies of the plural society, colonial policy and administration. In 1941, Furnivall suggested nationalism as a possible solution to the fault-lines of the colonial plural society created: "Nationalism can provide an effective counter to economic forces".[139] The institution of government would facilitate the "re-integration of society through Nationalism":

> [This] should aim especially at bridging the gulf between natives and the modern world, and at convincing capitalists that independence is in the interest of economic progress; in other words [Government] should aim at converting nationalists into capitalists and capitalists into nationalists. Government also has the duty to convert "present administrative machinery designed originally for maintaining peace and quiet, or law and order, into a service of "social engineers", charged with the function of creating, organizing, and giving effect to social demand.[140]

Furnivall's arguments provided the intellectual ballast for the change in colonial policy.[141] After the Second World War, the British embarked on "a worldwide experiment in nation building".[142] Colonial government was to play a central role in fostering nations out of

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[137] Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, p. 305. He also referenced similar circumstances elsewhere, such as Indian immigrants in the South Pacific (Fiji) and East Africa, and Syrians in West Africa.
[138] Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*, pp. 305-306.
[139] Furnivall noted: "For many reasons, the birth of Nationalism was important, but chiefly because it opened for the first time a prospect of bringing economic forces under control and inspiring the rule of law with will". In *Progress and Welfare in Southeast Asia: A Comparison of Colonial Policy and Practice* (New York: Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1941), pp. 48-49. See pp. 50-53 for nationalism's impact on colonial policy.
[140] Furnivall, *Progress and Welfare*, p. 68.
[141] Furnivall appeared to have maintained his ties with the Colonial Office, or colonial policy in general, after his retirement. While a faculty member at Cambridge University, he gave talks and published pamphlets on various aspects of social policy in colonial Southeast Asia. These included *Progress and Welfare*; *Problems of Education in Southeast Asia* (New York: International Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1942); *Educational Progress in South East Asia* (1943); *Memorandum On Reconstruction Problems in Burma* (New York: International Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1944); and *The Tropical Far East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945).
[142] Quoted in Ronald Hyam, "Bureaucracy and 'Trusteeship' in the Colonial Empire", in Judith Brown, Wm Roger Louis, and Wm Roger Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 277. Hyam quoted H. T. Bourdillon, a former official in the Colonial Office: "The central aim of policy as they redefined it was to lead all but the smaller isolated

colonial societies, with the broader aim of preparing the formerly colonized (and now partners) for self-government and/or eventual independence. In Singapore, this resulted in the deliberate pursuit of a social policy, which manifested in the establishment of a social welfare department.

In 1944, the Colonial Office circulated an information pamphlet entitled *Welfare in British Colonies*, authored by Lucy Mair, an anthropologist.[143] She traced the development of the Colonial Office's social service portfolio to initial concerns over education and public health. This expanded to include labor issues, youth welfare, community development, and the penal system (including juvenile delinquency). As "all welfare measures are directed towards raising the general level of the community", she observed that social welfare in a broader sense "covers the whole field of those policies and services that would be described in America as "nation-building".[144] Describing a "narrower sense" of social welfare, Mair listed "those aspects of social welfare which are not the special interest or concern of other Departments". These included:

> [T]he stimulation of community activities of all kinds through such organizations as village councils, community associations, and co-operative societies; welfare work in connection with housing estates and land settlement; the relief of the destitute, whether young or old; the development of youth services and recreational facilities, including home industries; the treatment of adult and juvenile delinquents, the aftercare of adult prisoners and the general care of prisoners while still in prison.[145]

In practice, social welfare became a collection of services and functions that did not immediately fit conventional government work. For better or worse, those "aspects" would form the basis and *raison d'être* of Singapore's social welfare department after the Second World War.

The Beveridge Plan was an added complication. The report had "dazzled" the Colonial Office, and fired the imagination of colonial governments and budding local nationalists throughout the empire.[146] The Beveridge Plan was not merely a vision of a

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colonies into self-government as soon as possible (though that was not expected to be soon), and to consolidate links with Britain on a permanent basis, so that ex-colonies would remain in the Commonwealth".

[143] Lucy Philip Mair, *Welfare in the British Colonies* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1944), pp. 101-102. Mair was a British anthropologist from the London School of Economics and Political Science. In 1943, she joined the Ministry of Information. After the war, she returned to LSE and became a professor in colonial administration and applied anthropology.

[144] Mair, *Welfare*, p. 101.

[145] Mair, *Welfare*, p. 101. These were quoted from the report of the West India Royal Commission.

[146] "Dazzled" reference noted by Lewis in *Empire State-Building*, p. 53. For Beveridge's impact on the empire and the world, see contributions in Hills, Dutch and Glennester (eds.), *Beveridge and Social Security*, in

victorious postwar future for British society. It offered a template for colonial societies planning a post-colonial future.[147] Beveridge's plan was anchored on the assumption of cooperation between "the State and the individual", which involved the former offering social security in return for the individual's "service and contribution".[148] The example of this cooperation is the social insurance scheme, funded by individual contributions and managed by the state. Ideally, this would foster a sense of responsibility in the individual, not only for themselves, but to their community and country. The essence of the post-Second World War welfare state was:

> [A] state in which organised power is deliberately used (through politics and administration) in an effort to modify the play of market forces in at least three directions - first, by guaranteeing individuals and families a minimum income irrespective of the market value of their work or their property; second, by narrowing the extent of insecurity by enabling individuals and families to meet certain social contingencies (for example, sickness, old age and unemployment) which lead otherwise to individual and family crises; and third, by ensuring all citizens without distinction of status or class are offered the best standards available in relation to a certain range of social services.[149]

In other words, the welfare state was the ideal vision of a fair and equitable society. Every individual was guaranteed a minimum income and an optimal standard of living, with state and society sharing responsibility. This vision was fundamentally at odds with the reality of the hierarchical nature of the plural society fostered by *laissez-faire* colonialism. Though committed to a rebranding of the British Empire, the Colonial Office was nonetheless eager to dampen the enthusiastic response to the Beveridge Plan. It warned against indiscriminate implementation without due consideration to the particular "social structures" of different colonies. Any attempt to implement social security in the colonies must take into account the adequacy of the "economic and financial base" of the colony as well as the particular needs of the colony.[150]

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particular chapters 9 to 14. The impact of the Beveridge plan on Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) is discussed in Laksiri Jayasuriya, "Sri Lanka's Experience of Social Development: Towards Equity and Justice", in Gabriele Koehler and Deepta Chopra. (eds.) *Development And Welfare Policy In South Asia* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014).

[147] James Midgley, "Imperialism, Colonialism, and Social Welfare", in Midgley and Piachaud (eds.), *Colonialism and Welfare*, p. 38. See also contributions in "Part II: Issues and Country Experiences".

[148] *Social Insurance*, pp. 6-7.

[149] Briggs, "The Welfare State", p. 228.

[150] Colonial Office, *Social Security in the Colonial Territories*. *Papers on Colonial Affairs, No. 5* (London: Colonial Office, June 1944). Social security was broadly defined as "freedom from want" or "the provision of guaranteed maintenance on some minimum scale for every individual in a community". The incompatibility of the Beveridge Plan for Kenya is noted by Lewis in *Empire State-Building*, pp. 51-52.

Still, by the end of the Second World War, British colonial policy was irrevocably altered. Just as Britain was anticipating its own welfare state, the Colonial Office was committed to its "forward policy" of development and welfare. Relative to what occurred before, it was a modern approach, with the underlying objective (without a firm timetable) of preparing its empire for self-government or independence. In practice, this reversed prewar colonial approaches to governance and society in Singapore and elsewhere, which in turn necessitated a more involved colonial administration. Social welfare was to be an integral part of this more involved colonial state.

Colonial Welfare, State-building, and the Role of Society

The introduction of social welfare in late colonial Singapore then becomes a case study, along the same vein of historical examinations of colonial state and society in Southeast Asia and in general. The idea of colonial welfare is a recent addition to historical scholarship. Scholars of colonial history, developmental studies, and social policy have only just begun to trace the colonial origins of social policies and programs in post-colonial nations.[151] As such efforts are preliminary, they are, for the time being, limited to uncovering *prima facie* continuities between the colonial and post-colonial eras.[152] Given the significant continuities and parallels between colonial-era and post-colonial developments in former colonies, there is much potential in studying the implementation of social policies, especially during the period where many colonies were transiting to political independence.[153] The idea of colonial welfare is intriguing. At first glance, the notion of a benevolent colonial power,

[151] In March 2010, a symposium was organized by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), on "Welfare and Colonialism: Social Policy and the British Imperial Legacy". Papers were presented on social security and social services, and covered a considerable swathe of the former British Empire, such as West Indies, Africa, the Far East, India, and Australia. Papers from this symposium were published in Midgley and Piachaud (eds.), *Colonialism and Welfare*. See for an earlier, more social policy focus publication, Catherine Jones Finer and Paul Symth (eds.), *Social Policy and The Commonwealth: Prospects for Social Inclusion* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[152] Contributions in *Colonialism and Welfare* took the position that "social policy in the developing world cannot be understood without examining the way welfare policies and programmes introduced during the imperial era have continued to influence current policy making".

[153] Midgely and Piachaud referred to "research in international social welfare" that has been "documenting and analysing the welfare institutions and social policies" of various societies. Such research are platforms to understand economic dependency or the underdevelopment theory (espoused particularly by Andre Gundar Frank), or economic and social development on a global scale. (Midgley and Piachaud, *Colonialism and Welfare*, pp. 2-3). The "Global South" generally refers to developing countries in the southern hemisphere. The north-south division is used as a reflection of the differences in social and economic development, which more often than not reflected the status of former colonizers and colonized. See James Midgley, "Imperialism, Colonialism and Social Welfare", in Midgley and Piachaud, *Colonialism and Welfare*, pp. 36-52.

proactive in the provision of social services, is difficult to reconcile with perceptions of the colonial experience as a "dark time" in human history, a period of time that ended "golden ages" of traditional civilizations, and which preceded the rise of modern nation-state.[154] The editors of *Colonialism and Welfare* for instance acknowledge that readers of their book "would be more concerned with 'illfare' resulting from imperial oppression than the policies and programs adopted to promote the 'well-being' of colonized people".[155]

Still, various scholars have demonstrated the complexities of colonialism, and in turn, the ambiguous nature of colonizer and colonized categories. This came about from a renewed interest in colonialism during the 1980s and 1990s. Frederick Cooper suggests that interest resulted from the failure of modernization theories to achieve predicted outcomes, and the consequent economic and social instabilities in former colonies.[156] Moreover, earlier assumptions of colonialism were questioned by new intellectual developments. These included the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* – the *mea culpa* of anthropology as the handmaiden of colonialism, Foucauldian theories of power and governmentality, and subaltern studies from South Asia.[157] Rather than taking colonialism and certain categories for granted, such as colonized and colonizer, more scholars began to make colonial processes the subject of their enquiries.[158] For instance, Ann Stoler's studies of gender, racial identities, and bureaucratic practices in the Dutch East Indies ask us to reconsider the meaning of certain categories, such as colonizer and colonized, or colonialism itself.[159] These new approaches have enriched our understanding of the colonial past. But it might have come at a

[154] More extreme perceptions are based to some extent by publications focusing on the more violent and traumatic aspects of colonialism. See for instance Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* – originally published in French in 1961 as *Les Damnés de la Terre*, and Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.
[155] Midgley and Piachaud, *Colonialism and Welfare*, pp. 3-4.
[156] For a historical overview of interest and disinterest in colonial studies, see Frederick Cooper "The Rise, Fall, and Rise of Colonial Studies" in *Colonialism in Question*, pp. 33-58.
[157] Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, pp. 46-52. See Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda", and other contributions in Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1997). Self-awareness of anthropology's complicity in colonialism began in Talal Asad (ed.), *Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1973).
[158] Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, p. 52.
[159] Representative literature includes Ann Laura Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and The Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c2002), and *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c2009). Cooper remarked in reference to Stoler's work: "The distinction between colonizer and colonized, rather than being self-evident, had to be continually reproduced, which led colonial regimes to pay inordinate attention to relatively small categories of people on crucial fault lines: racially mixed children, colonizers who "went native" … There was a danger of reproducing the wrong kind of colonization". (Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, p. 49).

price, as history was usually "occluded" by the seeming "modernity" of these newer approaches.[160]

Still, substantive histories have been written examining the colonial state and its impact on colonial society. In such instances, social policy, in the form of social (or personal) services, health, education, or labor protection, is usually the preferred medium. These include French and British colonial policies on African labor during the late colonial period, the historical development of a colonial state via social welfare in Kenya, and approaches to colonial medicine and public health in British India and French Morocco.[161] Others have also used colonial welfare and social policy, to examine the colonial state, its social security institutions, and their interactions and impact on local society, with Africa being an especially rich area for this particular approach.[162]

There are similar studies of various aspects of the colonial state in Southeast Asian history. Broadly speaking, those studies have focused on governmental institutions and structures, such as the military, executive and legislative bodies, the economy or the bureaucracy, or more abstractly, on the state as an autonomous entity. The Southeast Asian colonial state becomes either the precursor to the post-colonial state, an object to resist and to rebel against, or more subtly (via the application of Foucauldian concepts of power and governmentality) as an institution capable of surveillance and coercion. These approaches have produced scholarship ranging from studies of violence and coercion, state resistance or

[160] He had especially strong views about the occlusion and obfuscation of historical experiences via Foucauldian concepts and Subaltern approaches. "[B]ut if the overall experience of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonizers is slotted into a notion of "colonial governmentality" or "colonial modernity", the effort obscures more than it reveals". (p. 49). Commenting on the Subaltern approach to colonialism of "domination without hegemony", Cooper notes that "nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial regimes had neither the capacity for coercive domination that [Ranajit] Guha attributes to them nor a disinterest in articulating hegemonic strategies, however inconsistent. The history of anticolonial politics does not easily split into autonomous subalterns and colonized elites channeled into patterns of opposition bounded by the categories of imperial rulers; the politics of engagement are more complex than that". (p. 50).

[161] Cooper observed: "A careful study of late colonialism will hopefully be a step toward future analysis of how social issues were framed and reframed in the post-colonial era". See Larry J. Butler, *Industrialisation and the British Colonial State: West Africa 1939-1951* (London; Portland, Or.: Frank Cass, 1997); Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Joanna Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War & Welfare in Kenya, 1925-52* (James Currey Ltd., Oxford, UK, 2000); David Arnold, *Colonizing The Body: State Medicine And Epidemic Disease In Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1993), and Ellen J. Amster, *Medicine And The Saints: Science, Islam, And The Colonial Encounter In Morocco, 1877-1956*; foreword by Rajae El Aoued (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2013); Baltimore, Md.: Project MUSE, 2014).

[162] See for a representative selection: E. Naylor, "'*Un âne dans l'ascenseur'*: late colonial welfare services and social housing in Marseille after decolonization". *French History*. Vol. 27, No. 3 (2013), pp. 422-447, Jeremy Seekings, "British Colonial Policy, Local Politics, and the Origins of the Mauritian Welfare State, 1936–50". *The Journal of African History*. Vol. 52, No. 2 (2011), pp. 157-177, and A. Eckert, "Regulating the Social: Social Security, Social Welfare and the State in Late Colonial Tanzania". *The Journal of African History*. Vol. 45, No. 3 (2004), pp. 467-489.

avoidance, the politics of identity (of race, nationality or gender), the impact of technology and "modern" infrastructures (such as roads and railways), medicine and public health, urbanization, labor and economy, and state- or nation-building.[163]

One impression most of those studies give is that the colonial state was an impersonal conduit for the implementation of policy. The colonial state was more than that, particularly during decolonization, when state apparatus was used as a means to an end. In *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, Tim Harper observes that:

> The 'second colonial occupation' of British Malaya that occurred in the aftermath of the war saw the creation of a viable nation-state as the culmination of the imperial mission…. One of the most important keywords of late colonialism was community development. The British sought to break down the divisions of a plural society, and create an integrated economic and political entity, bound together by a shared allegiance, a common culture and the obligations of a common citizenship.[164]

[163] In lieu of an exhaustive list, I refer to the following selected publications: **Health:** Tim Harper and Sunil S. Amrith (eds.), *Histories Of Health In Southeast Asia: Perspectives On The Long Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), Lenore Manderson, *Sickness And The State: Health And Illness In Colonial Malaya, 1870-1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); **Violence / Surveillance:** Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Colonialism, Violence And Muslims In Southeast Asia: The Maria Hertogh Controversy And Its Aftermath* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009); **Nation-building:** Penny Edwards, *Cambodge: The Cultivation Of A Nation, 1860-1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, c2007), Tim N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1998); **Identity (Race / Gender):** Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood Of Government: Race, Empire, The United States, And The Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Women And The Colonial State: Essays On Gender And Modernity In The Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, c2000); **Colonial State:** Julian Go and Anne L. Foster (eds.), *The American Colonial State In The Philippines: Global Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), Robert Cribb (ed.), *The Late Colonial State In Indonesia: Political And Economic Foundations Of The Netherlands Indies, 1880-1942* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994); **Technology / Infrastructure:** Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers Of Happy Land: Technology And Nationalism In A Colony* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), **Prisons:** Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History Of Imprisonment In Vietnam, 1862-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c2001), Anoma Pieris, *Hidden Hands And Divided Landscapes: A Penal History Of Singapore's Plural Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, c2009); **Urbanization:** Brenda S. A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space In Colonial Singapore: Power Relations And The Urban Built Environment* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, c2003; first edition published in 1996), **Economy / Labor:** Ann Laura Stoler, *Capitalism And Confrontation In Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870-1979* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, c1995; first edition published in 1985), James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy Of The Peasant: Rebellion And Subsistence In Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Anne E. Booth, *Colonial Legacies: Economic And Social Development In East And Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, c2007), **Decolonization:** Marc Frey, Ronald Pruessen, and Tan Tai Yong (eds.), *The Transformation of Southeast Asia: International Perspectives on Decolonization* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004). See in particular Paul Kratoska, "Dimensions of Decolonization" and Karl Hack, "Theories and Approaches to British Decolonization in Southeast Asia" for an overview of British postwar policies.

[164] Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, p. 358. Kratoska also notes the change in colonial policy in "Dimensions of Decolonization".

This approach contrasted with the "militant *laissez faire*" prevalent before the war, where humanitarian concerns did not lead to decisive state intervention.[165] Harper also notes the postwar use of social welfare and broader social policy as a means to build a viable nation-state.[166]

The process was far from smooth. If we assume colonialism as a "system of domination and super-imposition", then, "[d]ecolonization does not mean just the withdrawal of the colonial power, but the establishment of new relations between the colonial power and the former colony on the basis of equal status and self-determination".[167] The attempts to establish new relations did not occur on a blank slate. Such attempts had to deal with existing social and economic structures enacted and then maintained by decades of colonial administration. For instance, in Singapore and Malaya, the British encountered resistance almost immediately from the time they returned. Alarmed by unanticipated Malay opposition, the Malayan Union plan was shelved in favor of the Federation of Malaya, which restored the prewar social organization of recognizing the Malays as the native community and the rest as visitors.[168] On the world stage, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China moreover were on the ascendancy. For many in Malaya, the Communist Party of Malaya and its affiliates represented a viable and inspiring vision of a post-colonial future and an immediate alternative to colonial administration. For various reasons, it eventually resorted to armed insurgency in 1948, which was pacified by 1960 but officially ended only in 1989.

Such developments affected indelibly the manner in which social welfare was introduced and implemented in Singapore. Communist subversion, among other methods, exploited genuine grievances resulting from the harsh social conditions of the postwar years. This resulted in social and industrial unrest, which in turn threatened the political status quo. There was a sense of purpose on the part of the colonial administration to show that it was serious in providing social welfare. At the same time, those developments accelerated decolonization. This in turn threw up unanticipated variables that complicated policy implementation. As there was little precedent on government-initiated social welfare, the

[165] Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, p. 24.
[166] Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, pp. 56-75.
[167] My emphasis. Rudolf von Albertini, *Decolonization: The Administration and Future of the Colonies, 1919-1960* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), p. 523.
[168] See Lau, *The Malayan Union Controversy*, for a detailed study of responses. The consequent tensions, compromises, and accepted resolutions for Malaya's independence laid the framework of the post-colonial state in Malaya. Harper concluded his study around the time of independence in 1957. Cheah Boon Kheng's *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation* details the impact of those complications from the late colonial period after 1957.

British had to rely and engage with individuals and organizations whose actions were not always manageable, in particular the women and youths who had survived the war and occupation and increasingly asserted themselves in the new social and political order that resulted in part from the dysfunctionality brought upon families and households by death and violence. As the pace of decolonization quickened, the British were progressively sidelined from their own policy by constitutional developments that prioritized local voices in the decision-making process.

State-building as a "kind of human practice"

This demonstrates to some extent how the colonial state, or at least its functioning, should not be simply perceived as staid or impersonal. The colonial state, as with any other institution, was defined by the processes set in motion by the actions and decisions of various individuals, which were moreover informed by prevailing contexts. This particular understanding draws from three disparate but related works. The first is John Furnivall's 1939 *The Fashioning of Leviathan*. Furnivall's caustic critique of the beginnings of the British Empire in Burma did not show imperial officers mindlessly carrying out their orders. They showed instead the complexities of a nascent British presence in Burma, of individuals working (within) the system, as Mr. Maingy did with tact and grace; or against it, as Mr. Blundell attempted and failed (resulting in a demotion and latter obscurity).[169] The second is Ann Stoler's recent reading of colonial anxieties in *Along the Archival Grain*. Her examination of the correspondences to and from Dutch colonial officials in Java, especially those of Frans Carl Valck, demonstrates less a confident colonial administration, and more its insecurities and anxieties of its individual members.[170]

The representations of the colonial state by Furnivall and Stoler representations mirror Tony Day's generic observation of state formation in Southeast Asia "as a kind of human practice".[171] Day's position is informed by studies of the Southeast Asian state, especially those before the colonial period. Efforts to find a position relatively free of Western

[169] John S. Furnivall, *The Fashioning of Leviathan: The Beginnings of British Rule in Burma* / edited by Gehan Wijeyewardene (Canberra: Published in association with the Economic History of Southeast Asia Project and the Thai-Yunnan Project, 1991). Originally published in 1939 by the Burma Research Society.
[170] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c2009), chapters 6 and 7.
[171] Day makes a distinction between studying the process of state making and studies of the state as "a finished product or structure that has existed in "traditional", "colonial", or "modern" forms…." *Fluid Iron: State Formation in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), p. 2.

assumptions have led scholars of Southeast Asia to "indigenous" sources, such as inscriptions, religious texts, literary works, cultural practices, oral traditions, and local government records (as and where available). There is less emphasis, a consequence perhaps of the preceding approach, on Weberian-bureaucratic structures, and more on kinship or familial bonds, patron-client relationships, the "localization" and use of symbols and rituals for legitimacy, and charismatic leadership. In contrast to the rational and bureaucratic states usually found in the West, Southeast Asia has the mandala, the galactic polity, the solar polity, the commandery, the *negara* (theater state), the *kerajaan* (loosely translated as the "condition of having a raja"), the cultural state, the "kingdom of words" – to name but a few.[172]

Despite certain differences (such as mainland Southeast Asian states were comparatively more bureaucratized), their foundations were not fundamentally different. They were largely based on personal connections between one who needs assistance and one who can provide said assistance. Via certain leadership qualities, such as charisma, and favorable circumstances, those personal connections were then brought together and expanded into super-structures, legally codified and/or legitimized via extra-legal means. This laid the foundations for administrative centralization, which in turn supported territorial expansion.[173] For example, the patron-client institution of kywanship, translated as "bondage", was an integral part of the kingdom of Pagan.[174] Michael Aung-Thwin observes that "economic difficulties sometimes drove people to seek security in bondage", as

[172] Tony Day gives a useful introductory overview in *Fluid Iron*. Amitav Acharya presents an overview of state formation scholarship, via political science, in *The Making of Southeast Asia: International Relations of a Region* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012). The various Southeast Asian states listed are taken from essays by Leonard Andaya and Keith Taylor in Anthony Reid (ed.), *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power, and Belief* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); Stanley J. Tambiah, "The Galactic Polity: The Structure of Traditional Kingdoms in Southeast Asia", *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences.* Vol. 293, No. 1 Anthropology (1977), pp. 69-97; O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture, And Region In Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1999 – rev. ed.); Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State In Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1980); Jane Drakard, *A Kingdom Of Words: Language And Power In Sumatera* (Kuala Lumpur; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Anthony Crothers Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture On The Eve Of Colonial Rule* (Tucson, Ariz.: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by the University of Arizona Press, c1982). Victor B. Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, C. 800-1830* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003-2009); Paul Wheatley, *Nagara and Commandery: Origins of the Southeast Asian Urban Traditions* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago, Dept. of Geography, 1983).

[173] See Victor B. Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest, c.1580-1760* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1984). Lieberman expands on this concept in his two-volume *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c.800–1830* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003 and 2009).

[174] Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, c1985), figure 2, p. 72. See pp. 75-79 for meaning of bondage in the context of Pagan, and pp. 79-91 for types of kywanships. The author suggests "attachment", instead of "bondage", as a better description of the kywan relationship. (Personal communication).

"kywanship promised social security, economic opportunity, family stability, social and family status, political mobility, and in some cases, even a better rebirth".[175] Similarly, the success of Malay maritime polities depended on the ruler's ability to harness the labor and loyalty of the *orang laut* (sea-faring peoples). Leonard Andaya identifies the orang laut as a "vital component of the [Kingdom of Johor's] power structure".[176] One moment in the kingdom's history aptly illustrates the group's significant role. The 1699 regicide of Sultan Mahmud destabilized the Kingdom of Johor, leading to the gradual fragmentation of the Malay world, and the eventual denigration of the *orang laut* community.[177]

Approaching from the perspective of social welfare, that is the provision for the well-being of the individual and society at large, allows us to connect studies of state-building across different geographical areas and historical periods. It provides a basis for an intimate insight into how the late colonial state was formed in Singapore, through the "eyes" and deeds of social welfare officers, social workers, volunteers, and the people they helped, who in turn are integral parts and extensions of social histories in Southeast Asia, especially that of women and of gender relations. Conventionally cast in passive social roles, typically during and from the colonial period, women played a significant role in establishing the foundations of the social welfare state in Singapore, and in developing Singapore's postwar society in general.[178] They did this in varied roles, such as medical doctors, politicians, academicians, volunteers, almoners and social welfare officers. The social welfare history presented in the following pages is partly constructed around the life and career of a local woman, whose experiences with the Salvation Army and later the Social Welfare Department, bridge in a personal way the pre- and postwar periods of Singapore's social welfare history. Moreover, the manner in which society proactively responded to a deliberate state presence in social welfare can also be party captured in the work of a group of lady volunteers supporting a

[175] Aung-Thwin, *Pagan*, p. 76. He cites two cases. One where a person in debt offered his services as a kywan and another case of two brothers who had been orphaned and hence "sought a patron and became his kywan". (p. 83). The author takes inspiration from a similar type of relationship in Europe, as described by Marc Bloch: one who takes the man (whose service is desired) "into one's household, to feed and clothe him … to grant him return for his services an estate, which if exploited directly or in the form of dues levied on the cultivators of the soil, would enable him to provide for himself". Quoted in p. 82; originally from Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*.
[176] Leonard Y. Andaya, *The Kingdom of Johor, 1641-1728* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 44-52. For a more recent examination of the *orang laut*'s relationship with their chosen leaders, see Leonard Y. Andaya, *Leaves of the Same Tree: Trade and Ethnicity in the Straits of Melaka* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), chapter 6.
[177] Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001. First edition in 1982), pp. 112-113. See also Andaya, *Leaves of the Same Tree*, p. 200.
[178] For an excellent overview the postwar women's movement in Singapore that eventually led to the Women's Charter in 1961, see Phyllis Chew Ghim Lian. "The Singapore Council of Women and the Women's Movement", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (March 1994), pp. 112-140.

child nutrition policy. Not all lady volunteers were the mere spouses of colonial officials or a bored socialite passing the time. She was typically the first face / voice a starving child saw / heard, a listening ear for desperate mothers and wives, transforming into a fierce advocate for women and children's rights after being exposed to intolerable levels of poverty. Her story, and of others in the chapters that follow, can only add to the fairly new subfields of women history and gender relations in Southeast Asian history. They not only complement and contrast with the predominantly male-perspective of Singapore's postwar history, the mix of local, Asian, British and other European women moreover blurred the lines between colonizer and colonized in effecting a colonial policy.[179]

Thesis and Outline

In a way, this fits the ideal depiction of the post-Second World War welfare state, supposedly a state that was not "remote" or "impersonal", but a "close-at-hand, essentially personally manipulated piece of machinery", whose collective power was harnessed to support social rights.[180] The following six chapters of this study elaborate on the thesis that state-building can be understood as the processes set in motion by the decisions and actions of individuals. To glean insights into state-societal interactions regarding social welfare, the following chapters presents and contrasts two viewpoints, that of the government or policymaker, and the appropriate non-government counterparts from Singapore society – except for Chapters 4 and 5, where the former presents the government side of the story, and the latter discusses several societal responses to the official presence in social welfare.

Chapter 1 has discussed how a social welfare history calls for a reexamination of conventional approaches to Singapore history and historiography, by situating a local history in the broader historical contexts of colonial welfare, state-building and society in Southeast Asia. Chapter 2 connects those contexts to the local situation in pre-Second World War Singapore. It gives an overview of state and society in early colonial Singapore, examines the reluctance of both state and society to act decisively during moments of need, and outlines the plans for social welfare to Singapore. It is essentially the "before" to the "after" of the

[179] For an introductory overview of women in Southeast Asia's colonial and modern history, see Barbara Watson Andaya, "Studying Women and Gender in Southeast Asia". *International Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (January 2007), especially pp. 123-128. Andaya also explores women in early modern Southeast Asian economy, society and culture in *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, c2006).
[180] Briggs, "The Welfare State in Historical Perspective", pp. 243-244.

following chapters, illustrating the entrenched structures and attitudes the postwar policy of colonial welfare had to confront. Chapter 3 outlines the situation during wartime and occupation, and the British Military Administration period immediately after. Developments during those periods anticipate the issues confronting the British as they attempted to introduce social welfare in Singapore. Social welfare, and colonial policy in general, was no longer the sole purview of the returning colonizers. The British found that they had to respond decisively to incursions made by a variety of local interests, which in turn forced them to adjust initial plans. This process of negotiation, compromise, and outflanking attempts all served to project a particular type of social welfare, and hence, colonial state.

Chapters 4 and 5 can be read as a two-part history of the introduction and the impact of an official presence in social welfare, which eventually created a social welfare state in late colonial Singapore. Effective implementation of policy requires institutional and administrative support. The introduction of social security in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere, was followed by the establishment of institutions and structures to administer those schemes.[181] Chapter 4 discusses the establishment of the Social Welfare Department, and its attempts to position social welfare as a government function. Still, the Social Welfare Department could only do so much in the face of extremely daunting social conditions in late colonial Singapore. It required support from the communities it purportedly served and the relevant expertise to carry out social welfare work. Chapter 5 discusses the impact of an official state presence in social welfare, as represented by the Social Welfare Department, through the histories of the Social Studies Diploma program, the Social Welfare Council, and the Family Planning Association. Those histories give multiple insights to the processes of

[181] In Imperial Germany, the *Reichsversischerungsamt* was initially directly responsible to the Reich Chancellor, and later to the Reich Ministry of Labour from 1914. By 1927, it oversaw all social insurance programs, handling tens of thousands of individual cases every year. After the Second World War, former *Reichsversischerungsamt* staff helped formulate postwar "social jurisdiction". See Eghigian, *Making Security Social*, p. 74, and Stolleis, *Origins of the German Welfare State*, p. 73. In Britain, introduction of social insurance meant a restructuring of earlier institutions. The Ministry of Health in 1919 was the result of the "merging of the old Local Government Board with the Insurance Commissioners", the former of which oversaw the institutions of the 1834 Poor Laws. In 1929, a Local Government Act replaced Poor Law guardians (drawn from local parishes) with Public Assistance Committees (PACs). In 1935, an Unemployment Assistance Board was established to oversee destitution relief on a "national level". In 1942, Beveridge called for the establishment of a Ministry of Social Security (eventually a Ministry of National Insurance). He also called for the suppression of "present system of Approved Societies giving unequal benefits for equal compulsory contributions…." See Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 191, 195-197, 214-215, 244, and *Social Insurance*, pp. 11, and 22-26 (for elaboration).

state-building in the context of decolonization, outlining how individual initiative contested and interpreted broad policy objectives on the ground.[182]

Taken together, the histories described in Chapters 4 and 5 reflect the building and realization of a social welfare state, in other words the creation and maintenance of institutions, structures, and their underlying attitudes towards the well-being of society. These elements still exist in present-day Singapore, positing a fair amount of continuity. The institutions and organizations described in Chapter 5 have been succeeded by the Department of Social Work in the National University of Singapore, the National Council of Social Service, and the Singapore Planned Parenthood Association. The Social Welfare Department, as noted above, is succeeded by a new Ministry of Social and Family Development.

Chapter 6 examines the longevity of the social welfare state via a biography of state-building. It builds on the idea of state-building as a human practice by presenting the personal histories of those intimately involved in effecting social welfare. The connections, bonds, attachments (or whichever suitable synonym pleases the reader) forged between social welfare officers, their clients and families are not dissimilar from the patron-client relationships that formed the basis of early Southeast Asian states. Even if it was ultimately undeveloped, the original intent was to position social welfare as central to Singapore's postwar community.[183] It seemed ideal. Social welfare officers and social workers came into contact with different sections of Singapore society in the course of their work. They assisted war victims, persons with disabilities, the elderly and the destitute, the juvenile delinquent, the desperate parent, or the malnourished child. They acted as bridges to other government departments, religious bodies, and voluntary organizations. The social welfare officer and their affiliates were significant cogs, in most instances unknowingly, in the machinery of the late colonial state.

Their work ensured the social welfare state persisted through the political changes of the postwar period, and long after the British left and independence was attained. The social welfare state could have moreover been something more, emerging as it did in the shadow of the British welfare state after the Second World War. A deliberate state presence in social

[182] The introduction of social security in Britain for instance was contested. To push through legislation, the Liberal Government had to negotiate with various interests, such as the Friendly Societies, private insurance companies, the medical profession, organized labor, and its own party's ideological bias against bureaucratic intervention. The final version of Lloyd George's health insurance did not include widows and orphans' benefits as a concession to commercial interests, and was operated by "approved societies" rather than government. Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 179-184 and Hennock, *British Social Reform and German Precedents*, pp. 126-151 and final chapter.

[183] As suggested by Harper in *The End of Empire*, pp. 62-75.

welfare was perceived by many as only the precursor to a comprehensive social security system in Singapore, ideally based on social insurance. The search for social security in late colonial Singapore encapsulates the major themes highlighted in this study, such as assumption of a central role for the state in social welfare and nation-building, the unintended consequences of policy implementation (caused to some extent by the complications of decolonization), and the substantial role of individual initiative. Chapter 7 serves as the culminating point of this study, first by reiterating these themes in narrating the abortive attempts to create a classic welfare state in late colonial Singapore, and from there, highlight intriguing continuities and parallels between colonial-era and contemporary social policies in Singapore.

To a point, the stillborn classic welfare state represented a failure of rudimentary nation-building driven by British colonial interests. Nevertheless, though the end-goals of a colonial welfare and development policy were not completely realized, attempts to introduce social welfare have left behind legacies in Singapore that are yet to be fully appreciated. Colonial history, in this study, is not about the "white people" in Singapore.[184] It is also about the processes, contributed to by the decisions and actions of both colonizer and colonized, informed by their inherent beliefs, histories, and peculiarities. This in turn created a particular type of social welfare state that can still be seen in contemporary Singapore. This study aids understanding of policymaking in general, not only in uncovering information and data, but also in highlighting the broader complexities and local variables that affect a seemingly straightforward exercise of policy implementation.[185]

Note on Sources

My research has benefited immensely from the archival holdings of the National Archives of Singapore and the Central Library of the National University of Singapore, as

[184] Variation on quote by Cooper in *Colonialism in Question*, p. 34. "Historians, by the 1960s, also started to look away from colonial history, for to study it too much, even critically, was to reinforce the old canard that real history meant the history of the white people in Africa; the new history that new nations needed was a history of either the precolonial past or the anticolonial past; colonial history could be taken as a too-familiar given". Quote is made in reference to African history. But it is striking how applicable Cooper's comments are for Southeast Asian history, especially the latter's initial search for an autonomous, non-colonial Southeast Asian perspective from the 1960s.

[185] See C. A. Bayly, *et. al*. (eds.), *History, historians and development policy: a necessary dialogue* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press: distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), in particular Michael Woolcock, Simon Szreter and Vijayendra Rao, "How and why history matters for development policy", pp. 3-38.

well as access to the digital database of newspapers published in Singapore (NewspaperSG). In addition to the institutional records of government departments and official proceedings, the National Archives of Singapore also holds the oral histories and private letters of Protectors of Chinese, the Secretaries for Social Welfare, social welfare officers, professional social workers, and private welfare organizations.[186] Some recollect the obstacles to overcome when building up an unprecedented government agency from scratch. Others provide an insider's view of some of the Social Welfare Department's core functions. Some are from the vantage point of the colonial officer (or the expatriate as they were known from the 1950s), making decisions from more senior government positions. A considerable number comes from someone born and raised in Singapore or Malaya. They began at junior or mid-level staff positions, but later rising through the ranks as the pace of decolonization accelerated.

To be sure, oral histories are predominantly memories and reflections, rationalized moreover long after the fact and consequently subjected to more contemporaneous influences and conditions.[187] Bearing that in mind, they are not presented in this study as "objective truth", to be trusted as representations of the past as it precisely was, *a la* Leopold von Ranke. Nevertheless, in the absence of detailed historical examinations of Singapore society, they provide a much-needed sense, and at times heart-rending accounts, of difficult living conditions in the past. As far as possible, those are corroborated by contemporaneous records such as government publications and newspaper articles. More critically, the memories and reflections are used in this study to understand state-building as a human practice, and not merely a narrative of institutions. The events and circumstances the interviewees choose to remember and then to inform their interviewers lend coherence and meaning to the social welfare state they helped established in responding to social needs, and from there and more abstractly, to the idea of social welfare in Singapore.

To present Singapore society after the Second World War, my study also makes use of dissertations prepared by students of the Social Studies Diploma program. The NUS Central

[186] As and where possible, oral histories presented in this chapter are reproduced verbatim as heard in the recording. This approach may at times include grammatical errors and awkward sentence structures, but it is done to mitigate the chances of misrepresenting the interviewee. Where necessary, the interviewer's question will also be included for context.

[187] For a background into the development of oral history in Singapore and several critiques of its use, see contributions in P. Lim Pui Huen, James H. Morrison, Kwa Chong Guan (eds.), *Oral History in Southeast Asia: Theory and Method* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998).

Library has in its holdings over a hundred such dissertations.[188] There is currently no definitive listing of the titles. Those available for reference can roughly be grouped into the following categories: (1) The social structures of particular communities;[189] (2) Physical locales and social institutions;[190] (3) Trades and vocations (some of which do not exist anymore);[191] (4) Traditions and culture;[192] (5) Contemporary social issues and related policies and processes.[193] Between 1952 and 1974, this program served as the training ground for social workers. The approach taken in these dissertations were predominantly ethnographical. Hence, they have intrinsic value to the historian of social conditions in postwar Singapore and Malaysia. They complement newspaper reports, clinical presentations of social life in government publications, and act as a substitute for hitherto inaccessible case files of welfare recipients.

[188] Searchable via the online catalog of the NUS Central Library, using "Social Studies Dept." as a search word. A selected bibliography of departmental publications can be found in Lee Bee Lum and Ngiam Tee Liang, *A Select Bibliography on Social Issues, Social Services and Social Work in Singapore and Malaysia: Based on The Publications of the Staff and Graduates of the Department of Social Work, National University of Singapore* (Singapore: Department of Social Work, National University of Singapore, 1984).

[189] These included studies of Straits Chinese, Jews, Javanese, Hainanese, Teochew, Hakka, Ceylon Tamils, Malayalees, Arabs, and "Malaysians" (referring to groups from the Malay-speaking regions in Southeast Asia)

[190] These include studies of a Malay village in the southern islands, *kampongs* outside city limits, or even specific places and sites such as Bugis street and Indian and Chinese temples, Christian churches, the mosque in the city and in the suburban area

[191] These include studies of general hawking, small industries (such as soy sauce trade), trishaw riders, Bhutanese peddlers, "rag and bone" traders, *jaga kerata* (literally "taking care of cars") boys, leisure activities of the poor in Chinatown, the *samsui* women laborers, Indian labor in the lighterage industry, and Cantonese domestic *amahs*.

[192] These included studies of the Malay "magician and medicine men" in Singapore, the *bomoh* in Kelantan, the Chinese physician and his patients, Chinese lineage settlements, childcare in a rural village, Malay practices and beliefs in rice cultivation, caste practices in Tamil and Hindu communities, and the *haj* in Singapore.

[193] For instance, there were studies on treatment of tuberculosis, juvenile delinquency, women criminals, opium addicts, alcoholics, the blind, persons with physical and mental disabilities, abandoned children, large families, family disputes, begging and vagrancy, responses to child illnesses, the chronic sick and dying, care for the elderly and the indigent, the impact of rehousing and resettlement on social relationships. Also related were studies on government policies and societal responses addressing those issues, such as employment assistance for persons with disabilities, youth clubs, a child fostering scheme, a Catholic organization providing welfare, and the rehabilitation of a juvenile delinquent.

CHAPTER 2. PREWAR SINGAPORE: WELFARE, STATE, AND SOCIETY

This chapter gives the background to social welfare in Singapore before the Second World War. It is a truism to state that Singapore was a colonial possession of the British from 1819. It is however less accurate to assume that colonial authority was omnipresent. There are instances where the colonial state was extremely reluctant to provide any form of social alleviation. This reticence was not limited to the government. Singapore society established and maintained a variety of social services. These were however mostly created for specific needs within each individual community. Singapore's colonial society was a plural society, a situation driven by economic objectives and defined by divergent (rather than common) outlooks. It took a series of economic and social crises, and motivated individuals and organizations, to push state and society out of its conventional *laissez faire* position, and take a more holistic approach to social welfare.

The Backdrop: Early Colonial Singapore

There were several discernible stages in British colonial policy in Singapore. The initial period, from 1819 to 1826, saw the attempt to establish and develop an economy and society very much based on the ideals of Singapore's "founder", Stamford Raffles, but limited by the practical realities experienced by his Residents, William Farquhar and John Crawfurd. The British, represented by the East India Company, were effectively a tenant of local Malay chiefs, "renting" rights and space to conduct trading and commercial activities. During this period, the Dutch, who had established their presence in the region and in the neighboring Riau Archipelago, disputed Singapore's status as a British territory. The 1824 Anglo-Dutch Treaty established distinct Dutch and British spheres of influence. The Malacca Strait was used as the line of demarcation, with the British free to operate northwards of the strait in the Malay Peninsula, and the Dutch in Sumatra. In the same year, a Treaty of Friendship and Alliance was concluded between the British Resident and the local Malay chiefs in Singapore, with the latter effectively ceding the "perpetual title" of the island to the Company and its heirs.[1]

Singapore's economy and society drastically changed after 1819. Raffles envisioned Singapore as a center of free trade, in opposition to the Dutch and Spanish policies of

[1] Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, p. 47.

"monopoly, trade restriction and territorial expansion".[2] Custom duties were banned and port charges were kept to a minimum, which had the immediate effect of plugging the young trading settlement into well-established regional trade networks, and over time undercut the protectionist Dutch in the Netherlands East Indies.[3] The island's population expanded quickly, from an initial estimate of about 1,000 inhabitants in 1819 to over 5,000 in 1821. In 1830, Singapore's population stood at over 16,000, with the Chinese forming the majority (about 6,500). By 1860, it grew to almost 81,000, with the Chinese population increasing to 50,000, or about two-thirds of the island's population.[4]

Raffles had grand plans for his new settlement, informed by a personal crusade in ensuring the freedoms of local peoples and to guide them to those freedoms via "European enlightenment, liberal education, progressive economic prosperity, and just laws".[5] He had a vision of a government that not only gives "the utmost freedom of trade and equal rights to all...", but also one that protects property and person, upholding the Liberal tradition of individualism. At the same time, the frontier-like environment of Singapore afforded opportunities Raffles eagerly embraced. He laid down plans for an orderly town, with well-demarcated zones for different ethnic groups and spaces for commercial and leisure activities. An experimental Botanic Gardens was created to "provide the foundation for a prosperous agriculture". Slavery and gambling were to be abolished, legislation enacted to protect Chinese migrants, and the establishment of a judiciary system to enforce those laws. Moreover, in anticipation of Singapore becoming a regional center for intellectual exchange, Raffles also envisioned an education policy that "must keep pace with commerce in order that its benefits may be ensured and its evils avoided".[6]

There are two parts to any kind of policy: the originating ideas and their implementation. Indeed, a policy is only seen as successful if the idea has been successfully implemented. Raffles' failures and successes do speak to the historical circumstances that restricted and encouraged the development of individual ideas. For example, an orderly town and the abolition of slavery were visible manifestations of British will and power. They

[2] Carl Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control* (UK: Routledge, 2005), p. 9.
[3] For study of Singapore's early trade, see Wong Lin Ken, *The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society; Bandar Puchong Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: Printed for the MBRAS by Academe Art & Print. Services Sdn. Bhd. Malaysia, c2003). For a detailed examination of the changes in Singapore's economy from the late nineteenth century, see W. G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and Development in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
[4] Turnbull, *A Modern History of Singapore*, p. 55.
[5] Turnbull, *A Modern History of Singapore*, p. 26.
[6] Turnbull, *A Modern History of Singapore*, p. 42.

undermined traditional forms of authority, whose power and status were based primarily on the ability to harness the labor and loyalty of their subjects. On the other hand, social reforms for education did not have any obvious tangible contribution to the economy but still necessitated immediate expenditure and regular outlay, while the experimental Botanic Gardens fell through after the demise of the gambier and pepper plantations on Singapore. Farquhar and Crawfurd encountered difficulties implementing Raffles' ideas. The former fell afoul of Raffles when it became known that he had condoned slavery and debt bondage, perceived as they were as local traditions, while Crawfurd could not solicit sufficient support to implement Raffles' education ideas. They operated on minimal expenses and encountered local hostility to policies that undercut traditional authority, such as anti-slavery laws, migration control and a judiciary system to oversee and enforce such laws.[7]

This was followed by a period of general negligence of the British settlement by the Indian government in Calcutta. Between 1826 and 1867, Singapore, along with Malacca and Penang, was administered collectively as the Presidency of the Straits Settlements. In 1830, as a result of financial difficulties, the Straits Settlements ceased to be a Presidency and became a portion of the Bengal Presidency centered in Calcutta. The local mercantile community chafed under Calcutta's administration for a variety of reasons. Those ranged from Calcutta's interference in Singapore's *laissez-faire* economy, to (ironically enough) the absence of meaningful government involvement over issues such as piracy, inadequate judicial and security measures, the dumping of Indian convicts, and the Chinese problem.[8] From 1857, they actively sought the transfer of the Straits Settlements from the Bengal Presidency to the Colonial Office.[9] The latter reluctantly assumed direct responsibility over the colony because it entailed increased expenditure. An ugly transfer of administration ensued, where senior officials, including the Governor of the Straits Settlements himself, were forcibly retired.[10] In 1867, the Straits Settlements formally became a Crown Colony, a status that continued until the British lost its Malayan possessions to the Japanese in 1942. This period coincided with broader administrative trends that moved away from Liberal ideals of non-interference, and to, as John Furnivall saw it, a modified Liberal attitude that justified state intervention for the purpose of efficiency and social justice.

[7] Turnbull, *A Modern History of Singapore*, pp. 38-43.
[8] Turnbull, *A Modern History of Singapore*, p. 87.
[9] Turnbull, *A Modern History of Singapore*, pp. 87-89.
[10] Turnbull, *A Modern History of Singapore*, pp. 87-89.

The Reluctant Colonial State (and Society)

The agitation to transfer administrative powers from Calcutta to London was one of the earliest instances of a local community attempting to define and assert itself.[11] Here, the term "local" is not defined by nationality, ethnicity, or place of origin. Instead, I take "local" to indicate a sense of belonging to a territory, be it territorial, such as Singapore town or island, or political, such as the Straits Settlements or the idea of British Malaya. Hence, the local community in Singapore included both European and Asian elements. At the turn of the twentieth century, Singapore population had expanded rapidly. In 1871, 94,300 persons were recorded in the whole of Singapore. In 1901, that figure rose to 229,900, of which 193,100 were living in the town area. Over the next two decades, Singapore's population increased to over half a million by the 1930s. On the eve of the Second World War, there were over 700,000 people living and working in Singapore.[12] The population of Singapore was predominantly Chinese, and concentrated within the municipality limits. By the early twentieth century, the Chinese community consistently formed over 75% of the municipality's population, the Indian and Malay communities at roughly 10% each, and Europeans at less than 2%.[13]

Administrative authority was therefore not representative of Singapore society, as the minority British took up key decision-making positions in the colonial government and in the Straits Settlements Legislative Council.[14] It is conventional to understand British rule in Singapore in terms of a "divide-and-rule" approach. But this may unwittingly suggest a proactive deliberateness that might not have been present. Instead, it is more accurate to see British rule in prewar Singapore, at least before the Second World War, as primarily to ensure the facilitation of economic activities. This meant that on one level, individual communities were left on their own devices, and on another, government only responded when its *raison d'être* was sufficiently threatened by disturbances.

[11] See for a general overview of civil society in Singapore history, E. Kay Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power* (Singapore: Talisman, 2005).
[12] Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore*, p. 158.
[13] Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore*, p. 158 (Table 5.4).
[14] See Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, pp. 94-95. See also quote from the Official Commission of 1875 on page 93: "We believe that the vast majority of Chinamen who come to work in these Settlements return to their country not knowing clearly whether there is a government in them or not".

Absence of a "Common Social Will"

There was hence the absence of the common social will, as highlighted by Furnivall in *Colonial Policy and Practice*. The tedious process in which the Pauper Hospital and the Chinese Protectorate were established is illustrative. The former took almost two decades just to begin construction. From 1821, beggars and vagrants in Singapore could seek refuge and food in a "large attap boarded shed" (a dwelling that uses the leaves and other parts of an attap palm, usually as a thatched roof). However, as the trade settlement expanded, the numbers of destitute needing medical attention also increased. The European mercantile community however refused to pay for what it saw was a predominantly Chinese problem. It felt that the Chinese, having benefited "from their stay in Singapore and had become wealthy ... should contribute towards supporting their poor". A Chinese merchant, Tan Tock Seng, eventually made a donation to erect the building in 1844. This was fifteen years after the idea of the hospital was originally mooted. The donation moreover was conditioned on others providing the financial means to support the running of the hospital. Even though construction was completed in 1847, the hospital did not take in patients until 1849, when the government's hand was forced after a storm destroyed the original "shed" that tended to the sick and destitute.[15]

The establishment of the Chinese Protectorate in 1877 was similarly drawn-out and frustrating.[16] From the 1860s, the numbers of Chinese migrants into Singapore steadily increased due to the opening of new markets in the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra, the corresponding increase in demand for labor to work in the agricultural estates and tin mines, and the push factors of natural disasters and man-made crises in China.[17] However,

[15] See Lee Yong Kiat's historical overview of "The Pauper and Tan Tock Seng Hospitals in Early Singapore", in *The Medical History of Early Singapore* (Tokyo: Southeast Asian Medical Information Center, 1978).
[16] See Eunice Thio, "The Singapore Chinese Protectorate: Events and Conditions leading to its Establishment" (Unpublished academic exercise, Department of History, University of Malaya, 1952), p. 25. (Later published as "The Singapore Chinese Protectorate: Events and Conditions Leading to its Establishment, 1823-1877". *Journal of the South Seas Society*, Vol. 6, Issue 1/2, (1960), pp. 40-80. The history of the Chinese Protectorate is collected in three separate articles, all written more than a half-century ago. Eunice Thio's article covers the events leading to the establishment of the Protectorate. For the first thirty years of the Protectorate, see Ng Siew Yoong, "The Chinese Protectorate in Singapore, 1877-1900", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (1961), pp. 76-99. For the years up to the Second World War, see Chu Tee Seng, "The Singapore Chinese Protectorate, 1900-1941" (Unpublished academic exercise - Dept. of History, University of Malaya, 1960). Edwin Lee examines the institution through the lens of colonial governance in *The British as Rulers: Governing Multiracial Singapore 1867-1914* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991), while James Warren's *Ah ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore, 1870-1940*, highlights Chinese Protectorate activities in managing prostitution and controlling disease.
[17] During the nineteenth century, China suffered from a series of wars (the Opium Wars in 1839-42 and 1856-1860), internal strife (the Taiping Rebellion in 1850-1871), as well as a series of famines and epidemics.

immigration control was non-existent. This allowed for the malicious abuse of the coolie trade, specifically the blatant kidnapping of *sinkehs* (translated into "new guests"), sometimes in broad daylight.[18] The situation in Singapore was so atrocious that it caught the attention of the Qing government in China, which had begun to recognize its overseas subjects from the 1860s.[19]

The Chinese mercantile community submitted several petitions between 1871 and 1873 to the colonial government for greater protection of the *sinkehs*.[20] Chief among their proposals was establishing an Immigration Office where *sinkehs* upon their arrival can be informed about their rights under British law.[21] The initial version of the proposed legislation met with difficulties as the European mercantile community – with a substantial presence in the Legislative Council – opposed the bill. Their reservations include the apparent inadequacy of the proposed legislation without proper enforcement, and the costs incurred in enforcing such legislation. This was a strange mix of altruism and economic considerations, similar to that surrounding the establishment of the Pauper Hospital.[22] But as a result, the proposed Chinese Immigrants Ordinance remained in limbo for the next four years. The stalemate was broken with an ultimatum from the Colonial Office in 1876 to look into the conditions and processes of the coolie trade, and the Protectorate was finally established in 1877.

Antecedents of State Welfare

The Chinese Protectorate is usually understood in Singapore history as the official response to the excesses of the Chinese secret societies, and later on, the government department that oversaw the control of prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases.[23] That it was originally an official agency to ensure the safety of the newly arrived Chinese migrant, a pseudo immigration department of sorts, is not as well-known. Even lesser known was its connections to the postwar Social Welfare Department, and how its work, as it evolved, laid the foundations for the postwar colonial approach to social welfare, as operated from the

[18] Lee, T*he British as Rulers*, pp. 76-77; also Thio, "Chinese Protectorate", pp. 25-35.
[19] See Yen Ching Hwang, *Coolies and Mandarins: China's Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch'ing Period (1851-1911)* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985) and Robert L. Irick, *Ch'ing Policy Towards the Coolie Trade 1847-1878* (Republic of China: Chinese Materials Centre, 1982).
[20] Lee, *The British as Rulers*, p. 77.
[21] Thio, "Chinese Protectorate", p. 48.
[22] Thio, "Chinese Protectorate", pp. 39-41.
[23] Ng Siew Yoong's article on the activities of the Chinese Protectorate begins with an overview of the unrest caused by Chinese secret societies. James Warren discusses the agency from the perspective of colonial management of prostitution.

level of government. For example, the first Secretary for Social Welfare, Thomas Ferguson Percy McNeice, was a Protector of the Chinese in the Straits Settlements and the Malay states between 1925 and 1942.[24] His memories (compiled in 1981) illustrate the evolution and scope of the Chinese Protectorate's work. What McNeice recollected about his work as a Protector appeared deeply personal:

> The work in the Chinese Protectorate is very largely dealing with Chinese people who came in with complaints of any sort. It might be a complaint of a wife against her husband, it might be a complaint of a child against the parents, or might be a complaint of parents against the child saying the child is disobedient. Or it might be a matter of wages. Anything really that affect anybody was dealt with by the Chinese Protectorate. We were there really to listen to complaints and try to solve problems as they came along.[25]

Rowland Henry Oakeley, a contemporary and colleague of McNeice, gave a more detailed description.[26] He recalled meeting people on a daily basis in the Chinese Secretariat building along Havelock Road. The *taijin* (Hokkien for "great person" as Protectors of Chinese were respectfully called), sat behind a desk in a huge hall with a standing capacity of three to four hundred people at any one time, waiting to receive any Chinese and their complaints. There were no restrictions on entry, nor was payment required. The *taijin* was aided by a Chinese interpreter and two boys who acted as runners.

Oakeley recalled, with some incredulity, a situation where a newly arrived twenty-five-year-old colonial officer trying to assist with a diverse buffet of problems, ranging from labor disputes (such as recovering unpaid wages), to women seeking protection from spousal abuse (and sometimes vice versa), to "uneducated" workers requesting "chits" to seek medical treatment at the hospital. Reflecting on his efforts, Oakeley commented that "sometimes it worked, sometimes it did not". He and other *taijins* had the authority to summon errant employers, to compel them to the negotiation table, and to pay owed wages.

[24] National Archives of Singapore (NAS), Oral History Centre (OHC), Thomas Percy Ferguson McNeice. The Civil Service – A Retrospection. Accession Number 000099. Interviewed in 1981. 22 Reels. He worked in various positions in the Chinese Protectorate. This included being a District Officer of Christmas Island in 1928 to oversee the large Chinese labor force working and living there, and was at various times Assistant Protector and later Protector of Chinese in Singapore, Johor, Perak, and Kedah. He also oversaw Chinese education in the Federated Malay States, and acted as a police magistrate. A brief biography is available in the City Charter special edition of *The Straits Times*, 1951.

[25] NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 1.

[26] NAS OHC, Rowland Henry Oakeley. The Public Service – A Retrospection. Accession Number 001332. Interviewed in 1991. 4 reels. Born in 1909, Oakeley arrived in Malaya in 1931 as a Far Eastern cadet in the Malayan Civil Service was similar to that of McNeice's. He held various positions in the Chinese Protectorate in Singapore and the Malay States before the war, and was interned by the Japanese. After the war, he rejoined the MCS and working in the Labour Department in Singapore.

Nevertheless, they had no authority over personal matters and family conflicts. Oakeley recalled a particularly sensitive case of a Chinese female wanting to marry a Malay. He could do nothing except to advise the girl's family to take her away. Still, the fact that Chinese attempted to seek redress for a host of personal problems was indicative of the Chinese Protectorate's good reputation among the Chinese community. A couple of children managed to make their way to the *taijin* to lodge a complaint against their own mother, alleging that she had thrown them out into the streets. Those accusations were eventually found to be baseless. Oakeley thought it was telling that even little children knew who to turn to in times of need (real or perceived). The personal contact between the *taijins* and the Chinese community represented one of the few intimate contact points between state and society in prewar colonial Singapore. This process would be continued by the postwar Social Welfare Department.

Things did move comparatively faster after administration of Singapore, as part of the Straits Settlements, came directly under the Colonial Office in London. In 1876, following a series of official enquiries into their well-being, a similar ordinance was passed regulating the entry, working conditions, and wages of Indian laborers entering the Straits Settlements.[27] This ordinance was superseded in 1884 by a new Indian Immigration Ordinance, part of which created the Indian Immigration Department, whose officers (called Indian Immigration Agents) performed similar "protector" functions to those in the Chinese Protectorate.[28] This department was eventually absorbed into a new Labour Department in 1912 (which was established in 1911 for both the governments of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States).[29]

Responsibility for the well-being of the Chinese and Indian laborer was generally left to their employers, who would provide food, shelter, and an income from work provided. The finer details, such as work and living conditions, did not immediately fall under the purview of government. Indeed, as far as possible, colonial policy did not interfere in areas identified to be personal spaces of the individual. The colonial government only responded after

[27] Summarized details of the Indian Immigration Protection Ordinance (1876) can be found in R. N. Jackson, *Immigrant Labour and The Development of Malaya, 1786-1920* (Kuala Lumpur: Govt. Pr., 1961), pp. 61-62. The Chinese Immigrant Ordinance did not regulate the working conditions of the Chinese laborer, only his entry and movements in Singapore.
[28] The Indian Immigration Department was based in Penang, where the majority of South Asian immigrants disembark. The Chinese Protectorate headquarters was in Singapore, where the Chinese laborers mainly arrived. Both agencies had representatives throughout the Straits Settlements, and later in the Federated Malay States.
[29] J. Norman Parmer, *Colonial Labor Policy and Administration: A History of Labor in the Rubber Plantation Industry in Malaya, c.1910-1941* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by J.J. Augustin, 1960).

prolonged pressures, as seen in the extended delay in establishing the Pauper Hospital, the Chinese Protectorate, and the Labour Department. Even then, the colonial government preferred to "share" the responsibility with leading members of the community. The Indian Immigration Department for instance was supported by a committee of government officials and representatives from planter associations and the South Asian community.[30]

The Singapore Po Leung Kuk was another example of this approach.[31] It was originally established in 1886 as a society for the protection of women and girls under the ambit of the Chinese Protectorate.[32] From 1888, the Po Leung Kuk referred to a place of refuge for those rescued from brothels and kidnappers.[33] It was chaired by the Protector of Chinese, and supported by the leading members of the Chinese and European communities. They visited known brothels, raised funds for the home's upkeep, training programs and overall management, and even vetted applications for marriage proposals to the girls.[34] From anecdotal evidence, it appears that the Chinese Protectorate or the government did not directly manage the home. The Catholic nuns were managing the Po Leung Kuk during the war, but when this arrangement was initiated is unknown.[35]

There is an interesting historical difference between the Po Leung Kuks that appeared in Singapore, the rest of the Straits Settlements and the Malay states, and the version in Hong Kong. In the former, the Po Leung Kuk referred to a home and was an initiative of the colonial government.[36] In Hong Kong, the Po Leung Kuk was a voluntary organization

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[30] The Indian Immigration Committee was created in 1906. While the Indian Immigration Department performed functions akin to the immigration officer, the committee was created ostensibly to directly manage the supply of Indian immigrant labor to meet increasing demands. Jackson, *Immigrant Labour*, pp. 115-126.

[31] Po Leung Kuk directly translates to "Protect Virtue Office". Other English nomenclature includes Office for the Protection of Innocents in Yen Ching Hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800-1911* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986) or "Office to Protect Virtue" in Edwin Lee, *The British as Rulers*. James Warren stated that the records of the Singapore Po Leung Kuk seemed to have disappeared. Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san*, p. 15. Ann Wee suggests that the records might have been destroyed when the Japanese took over the Chinese Protectorate building. See also Manderson, *Sickness and the State*, pp. 191-195, and Grace Paul, "The Poh Leung Kuk in Singapore: Protection of Women and Girls" (Unpublished academic exercise. Dept. of History, National University of Singapore, 1989).

[32] *The Straits Times Weekly Issue*, 20 February 1886, "The Protection of Women and Children".

[33] It was originally opened in Kandang Kerbau. The home was relocated to York Hill in 1928. The structures would be used later after the Second World War by the Social Welfare Department. See Tan Beng Neo's story in Chapter 6. *The Straits Times Weekly Issue*, 29 April 1890, "Annual Report on the Chinese Protectorate. Singapore, for the year 1889", and *The Straits Times*, 22 September 1932, "Chinese Topics in Malaya".

[34] Lee, *The British as Rulers*, p. 92. Lee suggests that the Po Leung Kuk attempted to act as a more humane competitor to the brothels, where marriages between clients and prostitutes were known to happen. McNeice recalled that the Po Leung Kuk also took in Malay and Indian girls, though fewer compared to the Chinese. NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 13.

[35] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, Women Through the Years: Economic & Family Lives. Accession Number: 000371. Interviewed in 1983. Reel 13 (of 26).

[36] See Manderson, *Sickness and the State*, pp. 191-195. Manderson notes a shift in policy, from protecting the man to protecting the woman. This shift coincided with the "discovery" of reproduction's "perceived role in

established ten years earlier in 1878 by local Chinese.[37] It was set up to eradicate the trade in kidnapped women and girls for prostitution, and had within its staff investigators who also actively tracked and apprehended kidnappers. But another objective was to distinguish kidnapped women and girls, and actual prostitutes, from the *mui tsai*.[38] The *mui tsai*, translated literally from the Cantonese as "little sister", was a topic of controversy during the interwar years, within the context of increasing imperial concerns over the flesh trade, child slavery, and control of diseases.[39] In the context of this study, what happened in Hong Kong was an indication of a social will. In this case, it was to preserve, within British colonial rule, what was then deemed a local Chinese custom of alleviating poverty and/or improving the fortunes of the female child, through the transfer of the child in return for money.

Family Networks and Community Support

A similar "social will", either to change or to preserve, was all but absent in Singapore during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries. Save for the Chinese Protectorate, state presence in the personal affairs of the individual was minimal. From the government's point of view, the well-being of the individual in prewar Singapore was, for the most part, the responsibility of their family, community, or employers. The following experiences of the three individuals were illustrative of the relative absence of the state in prewar Singapore, except during times of war and economic crises.

Valentine Napoleon Frois was born in Singapore on 8 June 1896, the fourth of five children (two sisters and two brothers). Frois' mother, a Malaccan Eurasian of Portuguese descent, passed away when he was seven. His father was a Dutch national born in Singapore.

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nurturing the family, in monitoring the health of women and children and providing services for them and in intervening in working-class lives with respect to issues of morality and material well-being". In *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians*, Gertrude Himmlefarb discusses a similar perception shift in Europe and explains it as the partial result of an increasing reliance on the scientific method to understand and combat poverty.

[37] Henry Lethbridge, *Hong Kong, Stability and Change: A Collection of Essays* (Oxford University Press, 1978).

[38] Lethbridge suggested that organization also helped preserved practices deemed immoral in Western eyes (as well as delaying "Westernization"). This changed when influential Chinese adopted Western ideas of modernity and society, and hence adopting the British understanding of *mui tsai* as another form of slavery. Lethbridge, *Hong Kong, Stability and Change*, pp. 79, 93-94, and 96.

[39] Colonial Office. *Mui Tsai in Hong Kong and Malaya: Report of a Commission* (London: HMSO, 1937). This report has two parts, a majority and a minority report. Generally, the majority report took a more optimistic view of the *mui tsai* question, while the minority report (by a woman) argued for "generalised protection" – protection for all girls under the age of twelve – because of the difficulty in defining and detecting a *mui tsai*. See Chu Tee Seng "The Singapore Chinese Protectorate 1900-1941", and more recently, Rachel Leow, *Contexts of abolition: The Mui Tsai controversy in British Malaya, 1878-1938* (Cambridge: Centre of South Asian Studies, 2008).

He was educated, and thus was able to work in various positions in the colonial administration, earning enough to give his family a decent standard of living. However, a weakness for gambling led to considerable debts that made family life more difficult. Frois' elder brother held the family together. However, in 1921, he died of tuberculosis at age twenty-nine. Their father, heartbroken at his son's death, died six months later. His sisters already married and living elsewhere, Frois moved out to live with friends, leading a carefree bachelor lifestyle. By that time, Frois had been working for seven years, as his family was unable to continue supporting his education after he turned eighteen in 1914. Not that he minded as he was yearning to earn a wage himself. He worked as a dispatch clerk in a trading house until he was "asked to leave" due to a row with the chief clerk. Unable to find employment in Singapore, Frois moved north to Port Dickson (in Negri Sembilan in Malaya) to stay with one of his sisters, and managed to find work as a shipping clerk. In 1931, after nine years of service, the company asked him to leave, but this time due to the firm's inability to stay afloat during the economic depression. Frois then returned to Singapore to live with his younger brother. He found work as a wharf clerk with another shipping company, and remained in that position until the Japanese invaded in 1942.[40]

Augustin Polycarp Gomez arrived in Singapore in 1922. He was born on 26 January 1895, in Trivandrum, the capital city of Travancore-Cochin (now part of Kerala). He was the third of three children by his father's second wife. His sisters died young. One from a stomach ailment when she was nine, and the other from typhoid at thirteen. Gomez had an elder step-brother from his father's first marriage. He was married with five children, but an initial well-paying job was soon undermined by gambling debts and other unseemly vices. At the same time, his father's business went under, and more debts were incurred. Hence, at seventeen years of age, Gomez left school and worked to support his parents and his stepbrother's family. Through family contacts, Gomez moved to Ceylon to work as a clerk in one of the bigger estate and produce agencies of that time (Bois Brothers Ltd.). He earned enough to pay off his father's debts, to continue supporting his family, as well as to have something in reserve for himself – apparently sufficient to attract six to seven marriage proposals when he decided to settle down.

By then, Gomez had worked in Ceylon for about ten years. In 1922, he married and soon after, left to work in an estate in Johore, Malaya. His brother-in-law, who had suggested

[40] Malcolm N. Coelho, "Old man on public assistance: an intensive case study of two individuals". (Unpublished academic exercise--Dept. of Social Studies, University of Malaya, 1958). Information was taken from personal interviews and the Social Welfare Department case files of the individuals he interviewed.

he come over, met him in Singapore. He worked in various rubber estates around Malaya as a "field conductor" (an overseer), and soon earned enough to bring his family over to stay. But an illness to his wife forced her to return home for treatment with their children. In 1932, due to falling rubber prices and a worldwide economic depression, Gomez lost his job and was repatriated back to India. Back home, he used his savings to purchase a plot of land and constructed a home for his family. The remainder of his earnings were spent on treating his wife's illness. Gomez managed to return to Malaya in 1934 when economic conditions improved, where he remained until the Japanese invaded.[41]

Wong (a pseudonym) arrived in Singapore in 1933.[42] Originally from Guangdong, China, Wong had worked in Hong Kong for close to ten years before moving to Singapore. Wong's eldest sister had encouraged him to move because of better employment opportunities in Malaya compared to Hong Kong. When Wong first arrived, he stayed in a *kongsi*, a lodging house organized according to vocation or point of origin. There, a roommate recommended an apprentice position in a motor engineering firm, paying four dollars a month and two free meals a day. Wong lost his job when the firm went bankrupt barely seven months after he had joined. In search of better fortune, he moved north to Kuala Lumpur in Malaya but was unable to find permanent employment. In desperation and to support his wife who had joined him from China, he began hawking a variety of items, such as "pins, needles, thread and paper flowers", to make ends meet. Wong recalled the first three years in Malaya were the hardest economically for him and his family. Eventually he found a job working for a Chinese contractor, making about seventy cents a day. Wong started out doing manual labor before picking up carpentry skills making windows and doors. He then moved to Johore Bahru working as a carpenter for various contractors and building firms, in the process helping to build the Johore Bahru General Hospital. Wong eventually found himself back on Singapore Island just before the war, working in the British naval base in Sembawang.

Central to the three men's lives were their families. Family connections assisted Gomez and Wong in settling down and finding work after their arrival in British Malaya. The one instance where the state made an appearance was in the repatriation of Gomez back to India, which was provided for by laws regulating Indian labor immigration. In contrast,

[41] Information from Coelho, "Old man on public assistance".
[42] "Wong" was a pseudonym given by the researcher to protect his identity. Chia Cheong Fook, "The Place of the Hawker in the Community: A Research Paper". (Unpublished academic exercise - Dept. of Social Studies, University of Malaya, 1954).

family was the principal safety net for Frois while he was unemployed during the Great Depression. Wong on the other hand had arrived in the middle of that depression, and relied primarily on his own wits (and the freedom to move) to ensure he found income to tide over periods of unemployment.

Frois's situation was similar to those who had been domiciled or were native to the land. The Malay community for instance used kinship ties as insurance against life contingencies. Studying the Singapore Malay community in the late 1940s, Judith Djamour found that a Malay got a "sense of security" from being "surrounded by members of his family", also known as *saudara*.[43] The Malay could count on his or her family and relatives for social support during times of need, such as sickness, pregnancy, marriage problems etc. She found that an individual was pitied if they lived alone, even the person was rich and healthy. The well-to-do Singapore Malay was not obligated to help the poor beyond basic necessities, such as food, shelter, or monetary assistance. It was however a custom, referred to as "*adat Melayu*", and considered morally good to give assistance during "real crises" caused by ill health, unemployment, or widowhood.[44]

In the absence of family or extended kin in a foreign land, community support was essential for immigrants. The Chinese migrant in particular could call on a plethora of clan, district, dialect associations, and related social organizations. They provided services for the transient worker, such as accommodation upon arrival, contact points for employment, monetary aid during times of need, travel fare, and perhaps most critically for the single Chinese laborer unable to return home, a proper burial service upon death.[45] Religious institutions such as churches, mosques, and temples also performed similar functions and services for the Christian, Muslim, Taoist, Buddhist, or Sikh migrant. Resources were drawn from members of each community, usually through payment of membership subscriptions or religious tithes.

Social needs were transient in Singapore's colonial plural society. The migrant's needs were decidedly straightforward. A place to stay upon arrival, some food, and, if he had not

[43] Judith Djamour. *Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore* (The Athlone Press University of London, first published in 1959, reprinted with corrections 1965), p. 35.
[44] Djamour, *Malay Kinship,* p. 47-48.
[45] This is a summary of a well-researched area in Overseas Chinese histories. See also Kwek Swee Soo, "An Account of the Sources of Benevolent Assistance which are Asian in Origin and Organization" (Unpublished academic exercise, Dept. of Social Studies, University of Malaya, 1954), Maurice Freedman, "Immigrants and Associations: Chinese in Nineteenth-century Singapore". *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 3, 1960, pp. 25-48; Sharon A. Carstens, *Chinese Associations in Singapore Society: An Examination of Function and Meaning* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1975), and Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986).

already been contracted to a job, information on employment prospects. Then they moved on to their jobs, and ostensibly came under the care of their employers. After a time, other needs presented themselves, such as social interaction, a place for worship, and more fundamentally, medical treatment when sick. As the story of the Pauper Hospital shows, some of the earliest welfare institutions for the Chinese were hospitals. This was followed by the Thong Chai Medical Institution (established 1867 by Chinese migrants to provide free medical services), the *Sian Chay Ee Seah* (established 1901 specifically for the poor Chinese), and the Kwong Wai Siu Free Hospital (established 1910 primarily by and for the Cantonese community).[46]

Such initiatives were usually community-based, often driven by a religious mission or principles, or sheer pragmatism, as can be seen from the following examples. In 1820, Syed Omar Ali Aljunied, a Palembang-based trader originally from the Hadhramaut (present-day Yemen), established the earliest known wakaf in Singapore, the Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka.[47] In 1854, members from the Sisters of the Infant Jesus arrived in Singapore (from Penang) to set up a convent school for girls and an orphanage (which doubled as a home for abandoned children) along Victoria Street.[48] In 1904, leading members (predominantly of Arab and South Asian descent) of the Muslim community formed the Muslimin Trust Fund Association. The association's primary purpose was to support Muslim orphans and indigent children, mainly by establishing and managing Darul Ihsan orphanages.[49] In 1913, a female medical doctor, Dr. Charlotte Ferguson-Davie, driven by the sight of the sick poor, high

[46] See for general overviews Zhuo Shun Fa and Zhuo Kai Ming, *Shan ji de gu shi = The Story of Sian Chay Medical Institution* (Singapore: Se7en Media, 2015), and Singapore Thong Chai Medical Institution, *Tong ji te ji = Singapore Thong Chai Medical Institution (Special edition)* (Singapore: Singapore Thong Chai Medical Institution, 2015). Information can also be found in their official websites.

[47] This is the oldest mosque in Singapore, located near the trading and commercial activities along the Singapore River. The mosque was originally a wakaf, an endowed donation usually in the form of cash and property for the benefit for the Muslim community. The wakaf is discussed typically in terms of economic and financial functions, but wakafs also formed the basis for social services such as education for children (madrasahs) and social assistance for the needy. The wakaf's role in the history of Singapore's social services remains to be examined.

[48] The original Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ) school and orphanage still exist in present day Singapore, albeit in altered forms. The original CHIJ school has been joined by ten more schools. Care for orphans and children expanded into a series of infant and youth institutions under the administration of the Infant Jesus Homes and Children's Centres (a registered voluntary welfare organization). Information for latter service taken from official website: http://ijhcc.org/. Accessed July 2016.

[49] One of the original objectives read: "To provide for the maintenance and education of orphans of Muslim parents and other unprotected and indigent Muslim children and to receive the custody of such orphans or other unprotected and indigent Muslim children and to place them in Darul Ihsan Orphanages for boys and girls established and maintained by the Association". Taken from "Short History of Darul Ihsan Orphanage" http://www.mtfa.org/index.php/darul-ihsan/a-short-history/. Accessed July 2016. See also Muslimin Trust Fund Association (Singapore), *MTFA 80th Anniversary: 80 Years of Welfare Service, 1904-1984* (Singapore: The Association, 1984).

infant mortality, and overcrowded living conditions, opened a dispensary specifically for women and children in 1913. This evolved into the St. Andrew's Medical Mission, which included more dispensaries and clinics in the poorer areas of Singapore town, a training program for midwives, a full-fledged hospital in 1923, and a specialized hospital for children in 1939.[50] In 1928, the Ramakrishna Mission, a spiritual and welfare organization that originated in India, opened a branch in Singapore. It ran classes for children and adults, and later established and managed two schools (one for girls), a night school for adults, and a boys' home – which also served as shelter during the Japanese Occupation.[51]

Welfare initiatives for children and youths were particularly prevalent, especially from the Christian faith. On the eve of the Second World War, youth organizations like the Young Women's Christian Association (1875), the Young Men's Christian Association (1902), the Scouts movement (1910), the Girls' Guides (1917), and the Boys' Brigade (1930) were fairly well-established. These organizations performed a variety of community services, such as classes with the aim of improving literacy or for advanced education certificates, training programs to improve employability, organization of sporting and recreational events, and perhaps much more simply (but no less substantial), fellowship and basic care. Singapore society, usually its elite and leading members, were not altogether reluctant to take action on specific social needs. The establishment of the Children's Aid Society (1902) and the Child Welfare Society (1924) are two examples of local-based responses, rather than overt extensions of religious fervor. The former was a continuation of work of the St. Nicholas Society, which had operated a home primarily for destitute European or Eurasian children.[52] The latter was, to some extent, a societal response to an increasing infant mortality rate as well as a colonial focus on infant and maternity welfare during the early twentieth century.[53]

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[50] A contemporaneous overview is in *The Straits Times*, 23 September 1932 "Medical Mission in Singapore". See also St. Andrew Mission Hospital, "About Us". http://www.samh.org.sg/about-us. Accessed July 2016. See also St. Andrew's Mission Hospital, *From Flicker to Flame: 100 Years of St. Andrew's Mission Hospital* (Singapore: St. Andrew's Mission Hospital, 2013), and L. Reid & W. Thay, *A Light That Shines: The Story of St Andrew's Mission Hospital* (Singapore: St Andrew's Mission Hospital, 2006).

[51] Information taken from "History Ramakrishna Mission Singapore". http://ramakrishna.org.sg/rkmsg/index.php/singapore-mission/history-2/, and "Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home Singapore", http://www.rkmbh.org/html/history.htm. Accessed July 2016. See also *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 21 January 1936, "Half Singapore Children Get No Education", *The Straits Times*, 18 July 1936, "Ramakrishna Mission. Educational Work in Singapore", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 3 February 1937, "Opening of Saradamani Girls' School", and *The Straits Times*, 5 December 1986, "Ramakrishna Mission is 100 years old"

[52] *The Straits Times*, 9 October 1902, "Children's Aid Society", and Children's Aid Society, *Children's Aid Society 1902-2002: A Hundred Years of Caring for Children* (Singapore: Watchmen Design Consultants for Children's Aid Society "Melrose", 2002).

[53] Manderson, *Sickness and the State*, pp. 202-203. Manderson connects colonial attention on the child and their mothers to developments in the metropole, where via the poor health conditions of working-class men called up

The society established and maintained infant welfare centers, which provided milk, medical treatment, and general care for babies and expecting mothers.[54] In 1939, the Secretary for Chinese Affairs for Malaya (representing the colonial administrations of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States) reported that there were over 3,500 children being cared for in homes and related institutions throughout Singapore and Malaya. The vast majority of which came under the care of religious bodies and voluntary organizations, such as the homes and orphanages managed by the Roman Catholic mission the Church of England, the American Methodist Episcopal mission, the Children's Aid Society, and the Salvation Army.[55]

In sum, social welfare services developed purposefully in early colonial Singapore, especially from the late nineteenth century. As Singapore's population grew, social needs presented themselves more urgently. However, the structures of a migrant society meant the development of social services occurred in a seemingly haphazard fashion. The "haphazardness" was mainly due to the organization of colonial society along parochial lines, where the individual's outlook and loyalties were primarily to their own communities. Colonial administrators, following policy, were generally reluctant to act, and only did so when sufficiently pressured and/or when the circumstances fitted overall policy, such as focus on infant health and welfare.

Precursors to Organized Welfare

That situation was tested by the prolonged economic slumps of the 1920s and 1930s.The Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States did not escape the economic slumps of the interwar years, the first during the early 1920s, and the second throughout the 1930s. There is precious little done on the former's impact in Singapore, and only marginally

to fight in the Boer War, the British metropolitan state "discovered' the importance of child welfare and related issues.

[54] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 31 January 1924, "Child Welfare", and *The Straits Times*, 25 April 1924, "Child Welfare Society". Difference between the two organizations were noted in *The Straits Times*, 7 March 1937, "Child Welfare Society and Municipality".

[55] He was speaking at an Imperial Social Hygiene Congress in London in 1939. He gave a useful overview of the homes and institutions managed by the colonial government, religious bodies (mainly Christian), and charitable societies in 1938. State institutions were primarily the Singapore Reformatory (a prison for juveniles opened in 1901 along present-day Clementi Road. See *Straits Telegraph and Daily Advertiser*, 11 May 1899, "Reformatory"), and the Po Leung Kuk. See for more details *The Straits Times*, 24 July 1939, "Singapore Reformatory to be run on Borstal Lines?"

more research done on the latter.[56] Scholarly opinion is divided on the impact of the Great Depression on Singapore and Southeast Asia. Depending on the position taken, the prolonged economic depression either had minimal impact on the region's economies and societies (and perhaps even benefitted certain sections of society), or caused severe distress in both rural and urban communities. Writing on the impact of the Great Depression on Singapore and Malaya, W. G. Huff observed how, relative to the Malays, the lack of access to entitlements and endowments, such as the ability to buy food or existing land to absorb urban unemployment and to grow food, increased pressures on the Chinese migrant community. Notwithstanding the distress caused, Huff concludes, "[t]he 1930s ended with Singapore and the rest of Malaya shaken but not fundamentally changed, nor pressing for change. Although the depression probably left a legacy of more political unrest than would otherwise have occurred, this was still comparatively minor".[57]

Agitation for political change might have been minimal, mitigated to some extent by the enforced emigration of Indian and Chinese labor. Still, the depression's impact on approaches and perceptions of society's well-being was substantial. Agitation for political change was replaced, in the Singapore case, by agitation for social change. The economic depression of the 1930s laid the ground for a more organized approach to social welfare, primarily through increasing public outcries that more had to be done for individuals and families in financial distress. The thrust and tone of editorials in *The Straits Times* and *The Singapore Free Press*, coupled with the substantial amount of press ink expended on topics such as alleviating unemployment, and providing financial relief, add layers to Huff's concluding observation. In examining this period in Singapore's history, we can see the beginnings of a break with earlier *laissez-faire* approaches to governance and society.

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[56] The latter event is discussed in W. G. Huff, "Entitlements, Destitution, and Emigration in the 1930s Singapore Great Depression", *The Economic History Review*. 2001; 54(2): 290-323. See also Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore*, pp. 169-179. For a social perspective, see Yeo Eng Leng "Effects of Great Depression on Singapore" (Unpublished academic exercise - Dept. of History, University of Singapore, 1973), Tan Bee Bee, "The impact of the Great Depression on Chinese in Malaya and Singapore, 1929-34" (Unpublished academic exercise--Dept. of History, Faculty of Arts, Nanyang University, 1980), and Loh Kah Seng, "Beyond "Rubber Prices" History: Life in Singapore during the Great Depression Years" (Unpublished Thesis (M.A.)--Dept. of History, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, 2004).

[57] Huff, "The 1930s Singapore Great Depression", p. 321. Huff referenced J. Norman Parmer's article "Attempts at labor organization by Chinese workers in certain industries in Singapore in 1930s", in K. G. Tregonning (ed.), *Papers on Malayan History: papers submitted to the First International Conference of South-East Asian Historians, Singapore, January 1961* (Singapore: Journal of South-East Asian History, 1962), pp. 239-255. Huff contrasted the event with the Second World War and the Japanese Occupation, crediting the latter as the "more severe shock and important turning point…." Huff also provides a brief but useful overview of the "revisionists" points of view in his article, pp. 291-292, and fn. 6 (p. 291). He does not fundamentally disagree with their views, merely to point out the situation in Singapore and Malaya did not "accord" with such views.

Societal Responses: Unemployment Funds

From a brief survey of *The Straits Times, The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, and other newspapers digitized by the National Library of Singapore, articles containing the phrase "unemployment fund" first appeared regularly in the years 1921 and 1922.[58] At the end of 1920, a *Straits Times* editorial raised the specter of unemployed Europeans in Malaya, brought about by unchecked speculation in the rubber trade as well as returning servicemen from the First World War.[59] In January 1921, a Planters' Unemployment Committee was formed in Kuala Lumpur to "collect funds and to grant relief" to Europeans formerly employed in the rubber estates and their dependents.[60] An Unemployment Fund was established, with donations (or public subscriptions as they were also known), from members of the public, planters' associations in the Malay States, and the governments of the Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements.

By March 1921, the committee managed to raise about $2,700 on its own, with the two colonial governments providing a further $10,000 each. Going by contemporaneous reports, the number of applications for aid was small, only about eighty within the first couple of months. Assistance was typically given in two ways, either fare for passage away from Malaya or temporary financial aid.[61] Nonetheless, calls for donations were published regularly, along with public listings of donation amounts throughout 1921 and 1922. In August 1921, a "non-European" unemployment fund was established to aid Indian laborers who lost their jobs in rubber plantations or tin mines.[62] The fund's reach expanded to include

[58] Via NewspaperSG, there were over 200 mentions of the term "Unemployment Fund" in 1921, and over 100 in 1922. There were no records of the term before 1921. After 1922, the number of mentions fell to 26 and fewer. Majority of mentions were in *The Straits Times* and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*.
[59] *The Straits Times*, 30 December 1920, "What Can Be Done?". See also *The Straits Times*, 31 December 1920, "The Past Year".
[60] *The Straits Times*, 10 February 1921, "The Rubber Industry". "The objects of the committee are to collect funds and to grant relief to necessitous persons of European birth who have been employed upon rubber estates in Malaya and who have lost their employment in consequence of the present rubber crisis and general trade depression and to grant relief to the dependents of such persons". The article noted that the committee had approached the "Government" (presumably of the Federated Malay States) for financial support to set up a central registry for employment opportunities. For an overview of planter attempts to deal with the 1920s and 1930s depression, see Desmond John Muzaffar Tate, *The RGA History of the Plantation Industry in the Malay Peninsula*; commissioned by RGA (Malaysia) Berhad (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 324-332. Tate identifies this fund as the European Unemployment Committee and Fund", created in 1921 by the FMS Department of Labour (pp. 327-328).
[61] *The Straits Times*, 5 March 1921, "Unemployed".
[62] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (1884-1942), 11 August 1921, "Indian Unemployment in Malaya", Page 5. One of its first fund-raising event was a boxing contest organized by the Eurasian

all "Asiatics", presumably the English-educated Chinese and members of the Muslim community who held clerical positions in affected businesses.

Further research is needed to better understand the social impact of the 1920s trade depression, for both European and Asian communities, in Singapore and Malaya.[63] Related to this current study, I would like to draw attention to public pleas for the colonial governments to take a stronger interest in the plight of the unemployed. Representatives from the various Planters' Associations had been lobbying the colonial administrators to do more to alleviate the unemployment situation, particularly in light of returning servicemen to an increasingly depressed economy. *The Straits Times* editorial published on 30 December 1920, called on the government to acknowledge the full extent of its responsibilities, and noted that the numbers of unemployed might be far more than what was publicly known:

> We are still hopeful that Government will not regard its obligations as fully discharged when it has made provision for the coolies who may be cast out of employment owing to the deplorable condition of the rubber trade. We owe a great deal to the Europeans also, more particularly to those who fought in the war….[64]

Another editorial lamented the "deplorably inadequate" response to the unemployment fund, though also observed that donations during those depressed conditions would be unavoidably low. The author then suggested that "If real help is to be given to the European unemployed, it must be through the Government and the public bodies finding them work to do".[65]

Repeated attempts by the Planters' Unemployment Committee were also finally successful in obtaining substantive official support. In March 1921, the Acting Controller of Labour was appointed as the government's representative to oversee European unemployment, and subsequently chaired the committee.[66] Before the month's end, the

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Association (first established in 1919), the Eurasian Literary Association, the Singapore Recreation Club, and the Clerical Union. See ad in *The Straits Times*, 23 August 1921, page 7.

[63] Parmer discusses the colonial government's response to the economic slumps of the 1920s and 1930s (in the context of the rubber industry) in *Colonial Labor Policy*. See especially penultimate chapter on "Unemployment Policy". Tate covers the human impact, albeit briefly, in *The RGA History*, pp. 327-330. John G. Butcher briefly covers the impact on European planters during the interwar years in *The British in Malaya 1880-1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 126-134.

[64] *The Straits Times*, 30 December 1920, "What Can Be Done?"

[65] *The Straits Times*, 5 March 1921, "Unemployed".

[66] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 11 April 1921, "Economy and Unemployment". See also Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, p. 127. Butcher also provided a graphic description of unemployed European planters drifting into Singapore in search of work, including blue-collar labor normally associated with Asians, such as shoe shining, much to the displeasure of other Europeans attempting to maintain a dividing line. (p. 128).

governments of the Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements made a grant of $10,000 each to the unemployment fund. Government assistance was also sought to create and maintain a registry of unemployed persons as well as employment opportunities, and to create jobs through public relief work.[67] After 1922, the appearance of "unemployment fund" in the print media abated, as well as the regular calls for donations and public listings of donors and their donations. This in general reflected the upswing in economic fortunes. However, following the 1929 Wall Street Crash, the term reemerged with a vengeance, appearing consistently in print media throughout the 1930s.[68]

In August 1930, Tan Cheng Lock requested government help to address the "exceptionally severe economic crisis" afflicting Malaya.[69] Tan, a businessman who made his fortune in rubber, spoke as a nominated member of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council. Speaking of the fall in rubber and tin prices, and its consequences on an economy and society that had become a "money-ed civilization", Tan suggested that the government "perform a worthy and noble act of self-sacrifice" by investing monies into the "economically sick and anaemic community of Malaya".[70] He continued:

> Government, I take it, does accept some responsibility for the welfare of our unemployed – a principle recognized by the whole of the civilized world – and therefore should contribute to the unemployment funds that have been created by public-spirited members of the Community to establish and maintain camps to house and feed the workless coolies. Other unemployment funds may be started for the purpose of giving subsistence allowances to unemployed clerks, planters and other victims of the slump, to all of which Government should make grants in aid.[71]

[67] The 5 March 1921 article gives insight into the assistance given, and the profile of certain applicants: "The cases before the Committee numbered eighty of which fifty-seven were for temporary financial relief or passages to other countries. The funds available average out to about $110 per applicant, and something a great deal bigger than this is necessary, because among the unemployed who have come under our own notice there are married men with families. Further, we believe that all the men who had a little cash in hand have refrained from asking relief in the hope something would turn up before they were destitute". *The Straits Times*, 5 March 1921, "Unemployed".

[68] Number of instances term was mentioned jumped from 48 in 1930 to 143 in 1931, 289 in 1932, and 179 in 1933. It fell to 61 in 1934, increased again substantially to 128 in 1935, before falling to 61 in 1936 and continued declining thereafter.

[69] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 26 August 1930, "Severe Economic Crisis". Verbatim transcription of Legislative Council proceedings the day before on 25 August 1930. Editors apparently felt so strongly about Tan's words they were reprinted again in the 27 August edition.

[70] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 26 August 1930, "Severe Economic Crisis".

[71] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 26 August 1930, "Severe Economic Crisis".

A native of Malacca, Tan Cheng Lock had, since the 1920s, been at the forefront of calls for greater independence of British possessions (specifically the Straits Settlements), but within the British sphere of influence.[72] His urging of the colonial government to assume greater responsibility for the well-being of the unemployed is noteworthy in the context of the then colonial situation – which had initially precluded such sentiments. Members of Singapore society did heed Tan's call. In October 1930, the Clerical Union brought together members from the leading social organizations in Singapore to form a committee to investigate ways to help the unemployed.[73] Initially, the committee wanted to ascertain unemployment numbers, but public response to queries were slow and to some extent, the public spirit (and will) was absent.[74] Eventually, they organized an Asiatic Unemployment Fund.[75] Donations came predominantly from individuals, sometimes from local business firms, and fund-raising events (such as movie screenings and proceeds from admissions into amusement and entertainment centers).[76] Payment of financial relief was strictly administered. Only unemployed clerks could apply, and relief was provided on a case-by-case basis – though reapplication was allowed. Fifteen dollars was the maximum assistance rate allowed, far lesser than the fifty dollars allowed for "families with more than three children" during the last slump. Each application was thoroughly verified for authenticity and to ensure the need was genuine. Checks were made on information given, to the extent of performing house visits. Errant or false applications were placed on a black list.[77]

The lack of information regarding the extent of unemployment, and the absence of motivation to find out more, hampered unemployment fund committee's efforts. The other

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[72] For background, see K. G. Tregonning, "Tan Cheng Lock: A Malayan Nationalist". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. Vol. 10. No. 1 (1970), pp. 25–76.

[73] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 4 November 1930, "Unemployed Clerks". Information about the Clerical Union can be found in *The Straits Times*, 27 December 1931, "The Clerical Union". Briefly, the Union invited delegates from the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA), the Eurasian Association, Indian Association, Chinese Association, Moslem [sic] Association, Sinhalese Association, and the Ceylon Tamil Association. Huff referred to this fund in "The 1930s Singapore Great Depression", pp. 301-302.

[74] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 5 September 1931, "Asiatic Unemployment Relief". Moderate headway was made in forming a General Committee and an Executive Committee, but it was quickly realized that "almost everyone on the Committee could not spare the time to go from one end of the Island to the other to make the necessary investigations".

[75] Planters associations, affiliated organizations, and individuals (under the banner of an Incorporated Society of Planters) also organized unemployment fund committees to aid European planters and their families, either to return home or in the provision of temporary assistance to tide over difficulties. See *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 26 November 1930, "European Unemployment". *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 17 December 1930, "European Unemployment Fund". *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 1 April 1931, "The P.A.M. Annual Meeting".

[76] Acknowledgements of received donations were regularly published in *The Straits Times* and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*.

[77] *The Straits Times*, 20 November 1931, "Asiatic Unemployment Fund".

major obstacle was the slow trickle of donations. One year from its inception in October 1930, the fund managed to top out just a little over $7,000. It had assisted "hundreds of cases". The numbers assisted increased particularly between August and November 1931, when "over 300 cases came up for consideration". It was a marked surge in applications for relief as only 107 cases were granted relief in the nine months prior (from October 1930 to July 1931)".[78] In November 1931, the fund had not received any donations for one month and was down to $162.[79] The following month in December, the fund reportedly had only fifty dollars left.[80] The committee voiced, very publicly, its concerns that the fund would have to shut down, and an appeal was sent to the government for aid. Moreover, it drew attention to the fact that not only had the governments of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States not donated as much as they did during the 1920s slump, they had also been contributing to the European Unemployment Fund since its inception in 1930.[81]

Short of funds and in dire need of fresh donations, the committee for the Asiatic Unemployment Fund was eager to publicize the plight of the individuals who came to them for help. In December 1931, the fund had registered over five hundred unemployed individuals. The Chinese formed the bulk of applicants. Even so, the committee's honorary secretary, Mr. H. C. Chan, observed that they could still call upon relatives and extended kinship networks and organizations for aid. In contrast, it was the "Eurasians who are in the

[78] *The Straits Times*, 20 November 1931, "Asiatic Unemployment Fund". Article noted that "only the most urgent and deserving cases … are dealt with". Majority of applicants were Chinese, with Eurasians "far away second while Indians and Malays were together third. A few Jews have also been registered". By that time, there were calls to rename the fund as the Non-European Unemployment Fund to include Eurasian clerks. This was resisted until the fund was taken over by the Singapore government in January 1932. See *The Straits Times*, 8 June 1931, "Eurasian Unemployed". [See also comic in *The Straits Times*, 27 December 1931, Page 10].
[79] *The Straits Times*, 20 November 1931, "Asiatic Unemployment Fund".
[80] *The Straits Times*, 9 December 1931, "Sufferings of Slump Victims" and 22 December 1931, "The Relief Problem".
[81] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 5 September 1931, "Asiatic Unemployment Relief". The committee also pointed out that the governments had made "very substantial contributions" to the European unemployment funds. Within a couple of months of its establishment, the European fund managed to raise more than $15,000, and remained in a healthy position throughout 1931. The governments of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States had made donations of $5,000 each in 1930, a further $5,000 each in early 1931, and another $5,000 by the Straits Settlements government in September 1931. See *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 2 October 1931, "European Unemployment Fund"; *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 4 November 1931, "European Unemployment Fund". To give an indication of the extent of help needed. In August 1931, the fund had just over $68,000. By October, it was down to about $21,000, kept afloat by donations by the Straits Settlements government ($15,000) and the Ex-Services Association of Malaya (over $17,000). See updates in *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 25 August 1931, 2 October 1931 and 4 November 1931, In total, it collected $250,000 from the public, and government contributed close to $140,000: *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 8 December 1934, "Distressed Europeans".

worst plight…. They have saved nothing practically for themselves, while in the case of the Chinese, many of them can fall back upon their own relatives".[82]

The chair of the unemployment committee, Mr. Lim Kee Cheok, extended an invitation to the press to join an investigative expedition of recipients and potential recipients of aid, and their living conditions.[83] The visit brought the group from one end of the municipal limits in Henderson Road and Alexandra Road, to the other in the *lorongs* off Geylang Road up to the Joo Chiat / Katong area. They witnessed firsthand the living conditions of Chinese, Tamil, and Eurasian families fallen on hard times. The following is an excerpt:

> Not far from Zion Road was a little kampong of old-fashioned attap and wood huts, black with age, the interiors dark as night. Chinese sat outside them and watched us pass. After traversing about 100 yards over the muddy road we reached our objective. It was low forbidding place, with dirt and filth to the side and under the house. A slimy pool from which a horrible stench arose, was opposite the house. Rubbish was dumped all over the place. On our arrival about seven children, the eldest was only 12, flocked out to the door from the gloomy interior, and they were followed by their mother. An addition to the already large family was expected. This little hut had two compartments – they could hardly be called rooms – was poorly ventilated and hardly a glimmer of the morning sun found its way into the interior. The rent, we were told, was $8 – a difference of $12 to the other house in Kampong Teo Chew – but one which meant that, although the family went into a dirtier house, money could be spent on getting food and other necessities of life. One of the seven children was going to school, which was a few miles away, and the only way in which he could get there was to walk. No money was available for transport. As a contrast to these hovels, a block of brick houses built by the Government for their own subordinates stood on the other of the road. What a come-down for an English-speaking clerk who probably had been earning $60 to $70 a month! Now he has to borrow money to maintain his family because he cannot obtain further assistance from the Unemployment Committee.[84]

Appeals for more substantial assistance were eventually heeded. In January 1932, the Straits Settlements government took over administration of the Asiatic Unemployment Fund. Still, "change" was only in form as the previous committee was retained with slight modifications. Other than appointing a government official as the chairman of the committee. The approach remained unchanged, which was to solicit donations from individuals and

[82] *The Straits Times*, 20 November 1931, "Asiatic Unemployment Fund".
[83] Report was published with photos in *The Straits Times*, 9 December 1931, "Sufferings of Slump Victims".
[84] *The Straits Times*, 9 December 1931, "Sufferings of Slump Victims",

organizations in Singapore society.[85] This continued until the demise of the fund in December 1934, ending with a paltry $348.88.[86] Having received donations from government and society during its first couple of years, the European fund fared slightly better. Depending on circumstances and availability of funds, the European committee was able to provide anywhere between $20 (usually for an individual) to $100 (for a family), or repatriation fares back home. Domiciled Europeans had also the option of joining a Service Company created by the Malay States Volunteer Regiment. The Service Company was akin to a public works initiative, whereby members assisted in training volunteers. In return, they received accommodation for themselves and their families, food, and a small allowance.[87]

But by 1933, the fund floundered and more regular public appeals were made.[88] In March 1933, the chairman of the fund committee, Mr. E. D. Butler, warned that "unless further material assistance was forthcoming form the European public, monthly grants would have to be reduced by 40%...."[89] In May, the fund had only enough to continue giving out relief for another three months. In November, notice was given that both government and the committee were investigating the possibility of reorganizing the administration of the fund. They discovered lapses in administrating the fund that had resulted in "unscrupulous" individuals drawing down the fund. The fund was moreover continuously supporting "unemployables", mainly individuals who had little to no prospect of gainful employment either because of old age or illness, or had given up. As a result, the coffers were almost depleted, and the "local unemployed" (in Singapore) already receiving assistance were warned they might not collect relief the following month.[90]

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[85] Two new sub-committees were organized. A club sub-committee to solicit donations from local clubs and societies, and a "begging" sub-committee to solicit donations from known well-to-do firms and individuals who had not donated yet. See *The Straits Times*, 9 January 1932, "Aid to Workless in Singapore". By November 1932, less than a year in operation, the government-chaired committee resorted to public appeals via the press for donations. *The Straits Times*, 5 November 1932, "Asiatic Unemployed in Singapore".

[86] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 10 January 1935, "Non-European Unemployment Fund". There is little to no information (at time of research and writing) as to the reasons for the end of the fund. Updates on donations became more sporadic, and towards the end of 1934, there was the general impression that the economy was improving – hence negating the need for such a fund. *The Straits Times*, 21 November 1934, ""Put Their Shoulders" To The Wheel".

[87] *The Straits Times*, 3 December 1931, "A European Appeal". The MSVR camp was located in Port Dickson, Negri Sembilan. The same article voiced concerns that the camp might be closed down by the government. It also pointed out that it was unfair to force domiciled Europeans to return home.

[88] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 25 March 1933, "Unemployment Crisis".

[89] *The Straits Times*, 5 May 1933, "All is not well".

[90] *The Straits Times*, 5 November 1933, "European Relief Fund Disclosures". The fund was reconstituted in February 1934 as three Distressed European Funds, one for Singapore and Johore, one for the Federated and Un-Federated Malay States, and the last for Penang and Province Wellesley. See for details *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 16 January 1934, "Unemployment Relief".

The needs of the unemployed received a small boost after Rotary International established a club in Singapore from June 1930. From a small club in Chicago in 1905, Rotary expanded into an international organization with clubs in every continent by 1921. On 6 June 1930, a dinner at Raffles Hotel marked the inaugural meeting of the Singapore club.[91] The Rotary Club of Singapore would go on to be the understated partner of various social services on the island.[92] In the immediate context of the Great Depression, Rotary acted as a non-partisan conduit for the collection of donations for the unemployed. An unemployment fund was mooted as early as 1931, but came about only in 1933. Like the Asiatic and European Unemployment Funds, the Rotary unemployment fund solicited donations from the general public. The immediate impact of the Rotary unemployment fund during the early stages (1932 to 1934) was minimal, as it was just one more fund amongst several at that time.

Nevertheless, there were tangible differences. For one, the Rotary Club of Singapore adopted a non-partisan approach to alleviating social problems regardless of ethnicity or creed. Indeed, the origins of Rotary in British Malaya had roots in efforts to create a social space for both Asians and Europeans.[93] Rotary acted as a broad-based focal point for organized action. As Rotarians (as members called themselves) met weekly, donations could be collected more regularly. Monies collected were given to all, particularly those who were not able to get relief from existing funds.[94] In doing so, the Rotary Club marked the beginnings of a more organized approach to social welfare. Rotarians were encouraged to place service and community above self, and to perform service for the general, rather than sectarian, purpose of cultivating fellowship within the community they worked and lived in.[95]

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[91] The dinner was presided over by James W. Davidson, Hon. General Commissioner and past vice-president of Rotary International. The original Singapore club members were supposedly a cross-section of Singapore society: Roland Braddell (President), S. Q. Wong (Vice-President), A. W. W. Ker (Hon. Secretary), Walter A. Tyler (Asst. Hon. Secretary), J. A. Clarke (Treasurer), H. C. Atkin Berry, S. J. Chen, Mohamed Eunos, R. J. Farrer, A. L. Hoops, and C. E. Wurtzburg (Directors). Information drawn from *The Straits Times*, 7 June 1930, "Rotary Club for Singapore", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 11 June 1930, "Rotary Comes to Singapore", and *The Straits Times*, 6 June 1980, "History of the Rotary Club in Singapore". Earlier in 1929, Rotary International formally inaugurated the first club in Malaya. By 1932, there were seven clubs throughout Malaya including Singapore. See Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880-1941*, p. 190.

[92] Rotary's support came primarily in the form of organizing of fund-raisers, and publicity efforts to solicit support from its members, who for the most part were members of other prominent organizations, such as government, business, and society. See list of initiatives at its website, "Rotary Club – About Rotary". http://www.rotary.org.sg/75years.html. Accessed 14 December 2015. For a historical overview until 1980, see Leo Cresson et. al., *Rotary Club of Singapore, 1930-1980* (Singapore: The Club, 1980).

[93] Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, pp. 188-190.

[94] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 14 April 1932, "Unemployment in Singapore".

[95] In addition to the unemployment fund, the Rotary Club of Singapore in its early years sponsored scholarships for education, organized publicity efforts to showcase Singapore as a trade and business center (see Rotary Club of Singapore, *Singapore as an Industrial Centre* (Singapore: Printed at the Malaya Pub. House, 1933), organized yearly Christmas parties for poor children, and participated in various charitable activities. For an

The Rotarians' approach contrasted with the segregation of existing funds, one each for Europeans and for Asians – the latter moreover strictly for members of the clerical vocation. Existing perceptions of responsibility, and the foregoing discussion on unemployment relief, must be understood in its proper context. Outside the communities the initial unemployment funds sought to assist, the rest of Singapore's population was exposed to the whims of the market economy and colonial society. Elsewhere, James Warren depicts in some detail the plight, and in some instances fatal circumstances, of impoverished rickshaw coolies during the 1930s economic depression.[96] Warren attributed the bulk of responsibility to the "Colonial Government of Singapore" as it "consistently chose alternatives that minimized costs...", particularly for basic social needs, such as housing, water supply, waste disposal and sewerage.[97] In discussing various aspects of the slump, others have also touched on the myriad of experiences resulting from losing one's job, and being unable to find another.[98]

The State's Response (and the Sorry Tale of the Silver Jubilee Fund)

An altruistic, benevolent gesture or commitment by the prewar colonial government was never forthcoming. Nevertheless, despite their best efforts, the governments of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States became unavoidably involved in financial relief as the slump dragged on. It did try to keep at bay permanent or recurrent financial commitments. The Straits Settlements government took over only the administration of the Asiatic Unemployment Fund in 1932, and did not provide further grants. The colonial government had provided grants to the European fund, rather generously as well, in contrast to the non-European fund. It paid the bill for repatriation, for unemployed Europeans in the Port Dickson camp, and was consulted in the reorganization of the fund's management at the end of 1933. But other than that, the government steered clear of any permanent financial commitment to the upkeep of Europeans and Asians in financial distress.

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overview the organization's activities between 1930 and 1934, see *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 22 February 1934, "The Past, Present and Future of Rotary".

[96] See James Francis Warren, *Rickshaw Coolie: A People's History of Singapore, 1880-1940* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, c2003; first published in 1986).

[97] Warren, *Rickshaw Coolie*, p. 325.

[98] See Huff, "The 1930s Singapore Great Depression", and Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore*. For an attempt at a social history, see Loh Kah Seng, "Beyond Rubber Prices: Negotiating the Great Depression in Singapore". *South East Asia Research*. Vol. 14, No. 1 (2006), pp. 5-31. For a regional study of the impact of the Great Depression, see Peter Boomgaard and Ian Brown (eds.), *Weathering The Storm: The Economies of Southeast Asia in the 1930s Depression* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000).

The one decisive measure colonial authorities did take was facilitating emigration and restricting immigration. It was an official policy to repatriate all unemployed South Asians. Between 1930 and 1933, close to 200,000 South Asians returned home on government's expense, which included free accommodation, food, clothing, and transport.[99] As described previously, Augustin Gomez was one of them. He was repatriated in 1932. By then, he had worked in Malaya for about ten years, at one stage earning enough to bring his wife and young son over, and had two more children. In 1932 however, the drastic fall in rubber prices led to retrenchment on a broad scale. After ten years of service, Gomez received $1,500 as a gratuity – estimated to be about six to ten months' salary. (If he had retained his job, his salary would have been halved to just above subsistence level). Gomez had by then saved enough to build a house and acquire more land in India. However, his wife's illness severely depleted the savings. He and his family managed to survive for a year. He was unable to find work, and hence resorted to pawning possessions and lived off income from his land. He managed to return to Malaya in 1934.[100]

In contrast, the colonial government did little for the distressed sections of the Chinese population, in Singapore or in Malaya. Hundreds of jobless laborers left the mines and estates in Malaya and converged in Singapore in search of better prospects. Sng Choon Yee, a local employee at the Chinese Protectorate, recalled that once the clan associations were unable to stem the tide, the grounds at the Chinese Protectorate soon filled up with unemployed Chinese looking for help. Sng also recalled particularly lodging houses for sailors going over their capacities in the midst of the economic slump, resulting in fights and general unrest.[101] Aid was ad hoc, and limited mostly to soliciting donations from Chinese businesses and associations to finance the return trips of those who sought to return to China.

The solution was to restrict immigration. On 1 August 1930, monthly quotas were imposed on entry on adult Chinese male migrants, from an initial number of just over 6,000 per month to a mere 1,000 by the final months of 1932.[102] The colonial government moreover

[99] Huff, "The 1930s Singapore Great Depression", p. 310.
[100] Coelho, "Old man on public assistance".
[101] NAS OHC, Sng Choon Yee. Pioneers of Singapore. Accession Number 000064. Interviewed in 1981. Reel 31 (of 48).
[102] Information taken from Saw Swee Hock, *The Population of Singapore* (Singapore: ISEAS Pub; 2012; third edition), p. 57. Author cited Parmer's *Colonial Labor Policy*. The quotas were part of an Immigration Restriction Ordinance enacted in 1928, for the purpose of (as Saw perceived it) controlling immigration "whenever the influx of immigrants threatened to bring about unemployment or economic distress". (p. 57). Turnbull, on the other hand, explained the ordinance as having the "object of improving labour standards and balancing the sex ratio immigrant communities by restricting the inflow of unskilled male labourers". She also situated attempts at controlling Chinese immigration in the context of managing emerging Chinese nationalism. See Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, pp. 141-146. Contemporaneous discussion of the bill focused

adhered to a strict policy of free repatriation only for the "decrepit and destitute" Chinese, and not for the able-bodied unemployed Chinese. This policy was disregarded twice, between August and November 1931, and again from May to July 1932, as concerns mounted over the "very large numbers of unemployed and fear of loss of control".[103] In 1933, the Straits Settlements Alien Ordinance was passed, incorporating earlier legislation to streamline existing regulations (including the creation of a new Immigration Department).[104] The manipulation of migration levers was the best illustration of the colonial society created in Singapore and in Malaya. The colonial government had provided the legal apparatus for the importation of foreign laborers to work in the burgeoning tin, rubber, and commercial enterprises. Yet, as it had done since the beginning of its presence, the colonial government as an institution was not actively involved in the colonial society that was being created under its auspices, but sought mainly to stave off disorder.

The sorry tale of the Silver Jubilee Fund is another instance in an uninterrupted line of prewar official ambivalence. In 1934, the mood in Singapore had changed. People were more optimistic as the economy seemed to be on the road to recovery, encouraged to some extent by projections of a budget surplus in 1935.[105] The European and Asiatic Unemployment Funds had fewer recipients, and more importantly, fewer applications – an indication of an economic upswing. Both funds ceased operations on the last day of 1934. The feeling that things had turned a corner was further buoyed by preparations to commemorate King George V's silver jubilee year in 1935. Part of the celebrations included the establishment of endowment funds to aid the needy and destitute. In early 1935, the drive for donations had already began in Penang and Selangor.[106] On 18 April, the Straits Settlements governor

more on the ordinance's scope of powers and its apparent focus on undesirable criminals. See *The Straits Times*, 27 March 1928, "Immigration Bill".

[103] Huff, "The 1930s Singapore Great Depression", p. 315. Huff takes this information from Parmer, p. 241 (see fn. 95). As the latter focused exclusively on Malaya (the records of the Federated Malay States), it is not immediately clear if Huff is referring to Singapore and Malaya as a whole, or just Singapore. There was moreover a probable complicating factor. Sng recalled in his oral history that by the 1930s, some of the early Chinese migrants had started families. Their children, born in the Straits Settlements, were legally British subjects. Hence, they could not be repatriated without legal consequences. Sng's oral history is however sketchy on the details. NAS OHC, Sng Choon Yee, reel 31.

[104] Saw, *The Population of Singapore*, p. 57. The immigration functions previously overseen by the Chinese Protectorate were transferred to the new government department. As British and Indian nationalities were not covered under the term "Alien", the new ordinance had the implicit objective (explicitly expressed in private) of restricting Chinese immigration, much to the chagrin of the Chinese community in Singapore. See Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore*, p. 154, and Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, p. 146 – where she quoted Tan Cheng Lock's vehement objections during the reading of the bill.

[105] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 3 November 1934, "Budget in Brief". See also *The Straits Times*, 19 November 1934, "Three Budgets".

[106] Both funds had collected about $50,000 each by the time the Singapore fund was launched in April 1935. See *The Straits Times*, 18 April 1935, "Governor Sponsors Silver Jubilee Fund", *The Singapore Free Press and*

announced the King George V Silver Jubilee Fund for the settlement of Singapore (also known as the Singapore Silver Jubilee Fund). The Silver Jubilee Fund was an endowment fund, with its "annual proceeds being devoted to the relief of distressed persons of all races, all creeds, all classes and all ages".[107] Management of the fund and relief distribution was entrusted to a board of trustees empowered by the Legislative Council. On 25 April, Governor Shenton Thomas launched the Silver Jubilee Fund in a ceremony held at the Victoria Memorial Hall.[108]

Solicitation for public donations was to go beyond the scheduled week-long jubilee celebrations, so as to build up a sufficient amount to provide financial aid. Governor Thomas gave assurances that Silver Jubilee Fund proceeds would "never be used to lighten public expenditure" on services deemed obligatory by the government. Yet, in keeping with existing policy, he also warned that while the fund remained open, "no other appeals to the public of Singapore for charitable purposes will receive official support".[109] In other words, the Silver Jubilee Fund was the proverbial line in the sand. Government made no commitment to donate then or in the future. No grants were promised. The burden would fall primarily on the goodwill and pockets of Singapore society.

Singapore society did respond, initially at least. In less than a month, the fund reached nearly $50,000.[110] By the end of May, it exceeded $60,000. After that, the rate of donations slowed, to a point where original projections of three quarters of a million dollars lowered to half a million.[111] Those expectations had until then been kept private, shared with the press perhaps to jolt people into action. No target figure was ever publicly mentioned. But taking into account Singapore's relatively wealthier position vis-à-vis Penang or Selangor, it was felt that anything less than $500,000 would be disappointing.[112] As early as May, barely a month after the SJF began collecting donations, the *Singapore Free Press* ran an editorial lamenting the absence of action following the initial outburst of support and goodwill for fund. It also

Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 18 April 1935, "Prospectus Issued by The Governor", and *The Straits Times*, 26 April 1935, "Governor Appeals to Singapore Citizens". The Silver Jubilee Fund, as an institution, has not been examined in detail. Edwin Lee makes passing mention of the fund in "Colonial Legacy".

[107] My emphasis. *The Straits Times*, 18 April 1935, "Governor Sponsors Silver Jubilee Fund". Similar Funds were also established in Penang and Province Wellesley, Kuala Lumpur, and Selangor.

[108] A detailed description (almost verbatim) can be found in *The Straits Times*, 26 April 1935, "Fund's Objects".

[109] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 26 April 1935, "Appeal by Governor".

[110] *The Straits Times*, 20 May 1935, "Jubilee Fund".

[111] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 21 May 1935, "Give Quickly---Give Twice".

[112] See *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 11 May 1935, "Jubilee Week and The Jubilee Fund". The article noted that the Penang fund had over $100,000 by that time.

noted that Lim Boon Keng had managed to raise $300,000 for Amoy University, and that the Penang fund had exceeded $100,000 (which was its minimum target).

In comparison, the Silver Jubilee Fund crawled to about $150,000 in November, seven months after its launch. A *Straits Times* editorial did not hold back in a scathing review. The "Jubilee Fund has been a failure…. The appeal to the people of Singapore has flopped very badly".[113] Another was specific in attributing blame: "That the Fund is not yet big enough to earn an appreciable sum in interest is not the fault of the organisers or of the Government. It is the fault of the populace".[114] The same editorial also noted: "The number of individual donations of $500 or $1,000 is surprisingly low – far, far lower than the number of people in the city who could give a $1,000 with less sacrifice than the clerk makes in giving his ten cents".[115] The disappointment was compounded by unwelcomed public re-emergence of poverty, moreover in the midst of jubilee year revelries. While the repercussions of the Great Depression lingered, in many ways the situation had changed since the early 1930s. By 1935, excess labor had been repatriated and expenses reduced to allow for a budget surplus. Hence, there was considerable public outrage when stories circulated of persistent poverty in both European and Asian communities, death and near-deaths by starvation, and attempted suicides to avoid destitution.[116]

> Families of seven, ten and more lived in low, forbidding places, in poorly ventilated compartments. There was dirt and filth all around. Hungry children and despairing parents, and pitiful stories of suffering left an indelible impression. These conditions unfortunately, still exist. Some of the families in the daily hope of getting jobs, have moved into rank, pitch-dark cubicles in town houses – set in the very midst of vice and crime. It is the old school of Asiatics – the semi-qualified and partially educated clerk of the old type, men with slight, if any, knowledge of modern commercial office requirements – who find the door of employment irrevocably closed against them.[117]

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[113] *The Straits Times*, 21 October 1935

[114] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 8 November 1935, "Is It Enough?" $250,000 was the minimum sum needed to generate the required amount of interest to provide financial relief.

[115] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 8 November 1935

[116] See for an overview: *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 26 October 1934, "Must Perish from Starvation", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 26 October 1934, "Europeans on Verge of Starvation", *The Straits Times*, 12 February 1935, "The Unemployed", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 1 August 1935, "Mother's Effort To Drown Herself, And Daughter", *The Straits Times*, 25 August 1935, "Malaya's Renewed Prosperity Mocks The Unemployed", *The Straits Times*, 29 August 1935, "Unemployment in Singapore", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 30 August 1935, Singapore Families on the Verge of Starvation", *The Straits Times*, 2 September 1935, "Starvation!", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 21 September 1935, "Chinese Rescued By European", and *The Straits Times*, 25 September 1935, "Protecting Employees".

[117] *The Straits Times*, 25 August 1935, "Malaya's Renewed Prosperity Mocks the Unemployed".

John Laycock, lawyer, Municipal Commissioner, and Rotarian, penned a letter describing the desperate plight of individuals and families near starvation and destitution:

> Sir, on Aug. 19 I received a petition signed by 51 persons. All the signatories were in English and by the looks of it they were practically all Straits born people. They say they are all family men, some with as many as eight to 10 dependents to care for. They state that they represent the most pitiful of cases of local unemployed. I am prepared to believe that, generally speaking, this is a true statement. They say they are utterly destitute. They have often to go starving and they are in constant fear of being turned out on to the street for arrears of rents. They write to me to ask if I can find any means of helping them to get some temporary relief: hoping that at some future time when the Silver Jubilee Fund starts to function it will come to their assistance.[118]

The Rotary Club unemployment fund that began sometime in 1933 had continued into 1935 as an interim relief fund. By August, at the time of Laycock's public exposé, the fund had only enough to distribute about $100 a month. Laycock called for donations to help support the fund for another twelve months, stating: "This town has a moral duty to see that its people are not allowed to die of starvation and want. It has a moral duty to itself to see that some relief is given in cases of this nature".[119] Laycock's appeal a round of public debate and reflection on issues concerning the role and responsibilities of government, perceived moral duties of society, and a proposal for a more permanent structure to deal with societal distress.[120] All of this took on particular significance in the context of slowing contribution rates to the Silver Jubilee Fund by late 1935. In the face of mounting public pressure, the colonial authorities finally caved. The Straits Settlements government guaranteed a grant of

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[118] Laycock's letter published in *The Straits Times*, 29 August 1935, "Unemployment in Singapore", and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 30 August 1935, Singapore Families on the Verge of Starvation".

[119] Over 250 cases had applied for relief in 1935. Taking the first 200 cases, which represented about 770 individuals, Laycock estimated that a sum of about $3,465 per month was required (taking into consideration fifteen cents per head for food and about an average of $4.74 for monthly rent). Laycock commented: "This seems to me to come pretty near to starvation level.... I spend more on my dogs. There are, of course, other sources of help. The Catholic Church helps in certain cases; the Protestant Church of England as funds permit; other denominations help members as able; and the Child Welfare and the Children's Aid Society do their best. Some cases have been disposed of by the Destitute Strangers' Aid Fund".

[120] A sampling of newspaper articles: *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 10 September 1935, "Assisting Singapore's Workless is a Community Job", *The Straits Times*, 16 October 1935, "Why Leave It to The Public?", and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 8 November 1935, "Is It Enough?". In his original letter, Laycock also referenced the Chinese community's ability to give more: "I cannot think that the well springs of charity will prove to have dried up completely. The same charitable people who put up $330,000 in March for the maintenance of the University of Amoy cannot refuse a poor little dole for workers now starving in Singapore. I think the position only need be put before them to recognise the obligation". There is no evidence that the Chinese community responded to Laycock's appeal. The University of Amoy was in financial difficulty after the business of its main benefactor, Tan Kah Kee, went into bankruptcy.

$750,000. However, once again sticking to its mantra of collective responsibility, the grant was conditional upon the Singapore Municipal Commissioners contributing $500,000.[121] The monies were eventually approved and credited into the Silver Jubilee Fund by January 1936. The fund began disbursing financial aid from April 1936.[122]

After a year, the Silver Jubilee Fund was hailed as the first instance of "organised, permanent relief of unemployment by the State – or, in our local circumstances, by the [Straits Settlements] Government and the Municipality".[123] The same editorial lamented the inadequacy of the final capital sum (about "twelve hundred thousand dollars", or $1,200,000), and the reluctance of Singapore society to do and give more. The Straits Settlements government did contribute an additional $2,000,000 to the fund in 1937.[124] However, the Silver Jubilee Fund's sluggish growth was galling for some, even more so when compared to the annual "gifts" of $500,000 as contributions from the Straits Settlements for "imperial defence".[125] There was a real need for a fully functioning Silver Jubilee Fund. In anticipation of the fund, *The Straits Times* ran an article in 1936 featuring "The people the Jubilee Fund will assist":

> Here is a Cantonese family. Father's present means of support is begging and borrowing from friends. Another father's method of supporting his family is taking food on credit from shops!

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[121] First announced in *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 8 November 1935, "Is It Enough?" and The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 8 November 1935, "Decisive Step to Help Singapore's Workless". See also *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 30 November 1935, "Commissioners Contribute $500,000 To Silver Jubilee Fund", and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 10 December 1935, "Legislative Council Approves $750,000 For Jubilee Fund".

[122] *The Straits Times*, 19 February 1936, "$3,500 Every Month". By then, the fund was capable of some $3,500 per month. It was passed into law (given "statutory status") in February 1936. See *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 18 February 1936, "Statutory Scheme for Public Assistance".

[123] *The Straits Times*, 18 January 1937, "The Jubilee Dole". The fund was administered by a "full-time officer of the Salvation Army and two committees, one which controls the general policy of the Jubilee Fund and another which examines individual cases".

[124] Ostensibly as part of King George VI's coronation celebrations, but also because the original capital sum (of $1,400,000) was deemed inadequate for the approximately 2,000 individuals assisted every month. *The Straits Times*, 13 May 1937, "$2,000,000 More For Singapore Unemployed Relief", and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 14 May 1937, "$2,000,000 for Silver Jubilee Fund".

[125] It began with the colony of the Straits Settlements covering defense costs in Singapore. (See *The Straits Times*, 5 October 1933, "The Colony's Finances"). From 1934 to 1937, $500,000 was given annually as a "free-will gift". (See *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 8 February 1934, "A Fine Gesture but Too Generous", *The Straits Times*, 28 February 1935, "Colony's "Generous" Defence Gift", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 12 February 1936, "Another $500,000 Gift from Colony", and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 27 April 1937, "Fourth Gift of $500,000 in 4 Years"). As the war clouds loomed in the late 1930s, the monetary "gifts" increased as well. See *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 29 October 1938, "Colony's $10 Million Gift for Defence". (The last amount was spread over five years).

> In an attap house on the Siglap sea shore lives a happy Eurasian father - happy in nothing else but that he has nine children. He laughs and smiles every time he talks of them – in spite of the fact he is three months' rent in arrears and is practically starving.
>
> Then in another part of Singapore is a wife whose husband deserted her. An order was made for him to maintain her with a monthly allowance of $15. He disappeared, however. The Fund helped the woman, and now the Chinese Protectorate is co-operating. [Possibly to track down the husband].
>
> A few days ago a young man came to the Salvation Army headquarters for help. Questioning revealed him as a runaway son from parents in Malacca. The officers got into touch with the parents. The son was given his train fare and a family is now re-united.
>
> A twelve year old Chinese boy was hauled to court for the seventh time for illegal hawking. The magistrate decided against imprisonment or detention in the Reformatory. Instead, the boy was referred to the "Rotary Fund", where investigations revealed the boy was supporting five siblings and his mother on "less than 75 cents a day - the proceeds of hawking cakes and drinks!" The family was given financial relief, and arrangements were made to obtain a hawking license for the mother. The boy earned an additional five dollars a month by being the playmate of the children of a Chinese family.
>
> Then there is a Eurasian family of 14 children ranging from 19 years to three months. Father aged 51 and the two eldest sons are unemployed. It is a family struggling to lice. Mother-in-law pays the rent of the house, which although very poor, is always neat and clean. The children are well-kept though ill-nourished. Father keeps money and rice from the Fund to keep them from starvation.[126]

An accompanying photo showed "men waiting their turn to receive relief at the Salvation Army headquarters in Singapore". The men did not seem destitute in the sense that they were impoverished. Some of them were in shirt and tie, complete with suit jacket and headwear. They looked professional and middle-class. As noted earlier, those who could leave or were repatriated had already left Singapore. Those who remained either had made Singapore a home, or were powerless to help themselves. These were moreover not limited to the Asian communities. When their main breadwinners lost their jobs, European families also found themselves in hardship.

> Here is the tragic story of an Englishman with a wife and five children. They once lived in a respectable quarter of the town. They next stayed in a hovel among Chinese squatters. Out of work for several years, this man gradually sold his belongings until he was left with a few chairs and a couple of tables.

[126] *The Straits Times*, 8 March 1936, "The People the Jubilee Fund Will Assist".

> He moved from the house to the hovel during the night, too ashamed to let his neighbours see to what quantity his furniture had been reduced. He himself carried his few sticks of furniture from the ricksha to his new home situated in an estate off a main road. A treasured possession was a canary which sang beautifully. He was ready to part with it for $5 in order to move house. Fortunately, he received some help, and the canary continued to revive his tired spirit when he arrived home every evening after a 14-mile trudge to town and back in search of work. He and his family slept on the floor.[127]

In such instances, the despair of poverty appeared to be accompanied by additional feelings of shame. In the same article, there was an inherent expectation of a better standard of living. The author observed that while:

> No Europeans are so destitute as to lack shelter and a certain quantity of food, but there are the miseries – difficult to realise by those in receipt of regular incomes – of job-seeking when one is without the wherewithal to purchase razor blades, soap or a toothbrush, when one is without tram or ricksha fare and when the dhoby has declined (reasonably enough) to return the last white suit.[128]

Another letter details more graphically (and in arresting prose) the shame of poverty:

> What great agonies of suffering and hardship are hidden away in some of these wretched homes! Many are living from hand to mouth, scarcely ever sure that they will get the wherewithal for the morrow, while not a few of the still more unlucky ones are actually starving!! Work they are unable to get: property of any kind have none. They appeal to friends or relatives for assistance but their cries, alas, often fell on ears not deaf but deliberately turned away. It is not so much physical pain as mental agony that has to be bravely and patiently borne, for, added to the already intolerable pangs of hunger, one has often to bear meekly the insults and taunting scoffs of purse-proud and coarse-grained people to live in constant dread of being turned out to the streets at any moment for arrears of rents; to see wife and children and, in some cases, aged parents slowly starved to but mere shadows of their former selves – these are the things that take the colour from the cheek, the light from the eyes, the buoyancy from the step.[129]

[127] *The Straits Times*, 25 August 1935, "Malaya's Renewed Prosperity Mocks the Unemployed". See also *The Straits Times*, 18 August 1935, "Destitute Europeans in Singapore", *The Straits Times*, 4 August 1935, "The Poor Plea for Alleviation of Their Lot", and *The Straits Times*, 10 September 1935, "European Fighting Against Destitution".
[128] *The Straits Times*, 25 August 1935, "Malaya's Renewed Prosperity Mocks the Unemployed". "Dhoby" is Hindi for laundry. In this instance it refers to an Indian laundryperson.
[129] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 22 June 1935, "Our Unemployed".

The author, signed off as *sic est vita* (Thus is Life), was lamenting the closure in March 1936 of the Rotary interim relief fund. In less than a year, the fund distributed over $14,000, about 90,000 *katis* of rice, milk and other necessities to the "poor of Singapore".[130]

The Rotary receded from the public view when it ceased distributing financial relief directly. But it remained a significant (if slightly understated) player in Singapore's social welfare history in organizing fund-raisers and talks to raise awareness of social issues. Moreover, its broad-based approach to social services and its proactive members, played a key role, not solely in alleviating relief, but perhaps more in providing an organized and coherent voice for more action by government and society. Social services were previously more or less designed and delivered along ethnicity, creed, or social need. The Rotary's all-encompassing and inclusive message of "Service Above Self" provided a common basis – at least the potential – for the divergent loyalties of the colonial plural society.

A New Approach: The Salvation Army

In the midst of the "rediscovery" of poverty in Singapore, the all-inclusive approach espoused by the Rotarians was given a boost by the Salvation Army. In March 1935, Herbert Arthur Lord arrived in Singapore to conduct a month-long study of local social conditions, and to assess the feasibility of setting up a base for Salvation Army operations.[131] A month later, the organization confirmed that it would establish an office in Singapore. It rented "a house and office" in Killiney Road and wanted to also establish a meeting center in the vicinity of Dhoby Ghaut.[132] Lord highlighted two projects the Army was interested in. First,

[130] *The Straits Times*, 21 March 1936, "$14,050 Given to Poor". Archdeacon Graham White chaired the relief committee. He remained in Singapore throughout the war and occupation, and died on 8 May 1945 during internment at Sime Road Camp.

[131] See *The Straits Times*, 15 March 1935, "Salvation Army*", The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 18 March 1935, "Brigadier Lord", and *The Straits Times*, 18 April 1935, "Office to be Opened: Spiritual and Social Work". Herbert Arthur Lord arrived in Singapore a veteran Salvationist, having worked in Korea and surrounding countries for twenty-five years. Born in Liverpool in 1889 to Salvationists, he joined the Salvation Army and began working in Korea in 1909. He remained in Korea until ordered to assess the feasibility of starting up Salvation Army centers in Malaya and Singapore. He was interned in Changi during the Second World War and the Japanese Occupation. After the war, he returned to Korea and was again interned by the North Koreans for three years during the Korean conflict. He survived and died in 1971 in England. For a brief biographical background, see *The Straits Times*, 15 April 1971, "Man who brought the Salvation Army to Singapore dies, 83".

[132] It eventually made its headquarters at the former house of Tan Yeok Nee at the junction of Clemenceau Avenue and Penang Road. Tan was a Teochew businessman active in Singapore and Johor in the nineteenth century. The house was completed in 1885, and is presently a national monument. See *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 15 January 1938, "Temple House to be Headquarters of Salvation Army", and "Former House of Tan Yeok Nee", http://www.nhb.gov.sg/places/sites-and-monuments/national-monuments/former-house-of-tan-yeok-nee. Accessed 21 December 2015. Initially renting the premises, the

the establishment of a home for women over nineteen years of age, to complement the Po Leung Kuk, which took in younger girls, and second, a program for "boys of all nationalities", to ensure they did not go to prison.[133]

The Salvation Army did not waste any time. In June, it took over the management of the Singapore Aftercare Association. Originally established by the Rotary Club to assist ex-prisoners, the association was in danger of being dissolved. In taking over, the Salvation Army ensured a social service could continue.[134] The Salvation Army also took over the administration of the Rotary Club's relief fund. After a survey of Singapore's approach to the provision of relief, Lord felt that there was an "urgent need for co-ordination of the work of distress locally". He cited instances "where people had applied to the Rotary Club for milk for their babies when this could have been obtained from the Child Welfare Society". Lord envisioned some form of "central committee to deal with all applications for distress", primarily to redirect requests and applications to the appropriate organization for assistance.[135]

Soon after, a relief committee, comprising of "representatives of all communities – European, Eurasian, Chinese, Indian and Malay", was formed. It met weekly to consider and to approve cases put forth by Captain Frank E. Bainbridge of the Salvation Army. Designated the Relieving Officer, Bainbridge directed the clerical work and investigations into each application, introducing a systematic approach to calculating and disbursing financial aid.

> The scale of relief is on the general basis of 10 cents a person a day. In practical administration however, this has been somewhat modified: the first adult in the family receiving a minimum of $5; all other adults in the family receive $3 a month, and the grant for children according to a graduated scale from birth up to 16 years of age, after which they are classed as adults…. Relief is given in the form of cash and rice; for instance, a single individual living alone being entitled to $5 a month received 20 katty of rice [about twenty-six pounds] and $4 in cash. In the case of babies up to two years old, milk is given instead of money.[136]

Salvation Army bought the land and building for $50,000 in 1940. See *The Straits Times*, 5 March 1940, "Salvation Army to Buy Old Chinese House".

[133] *The Straits Times*, 30 April 1935, "Salvation Army in Singapore".

[134] See for an overview: *The Straits Times*, 1 June 1935, "Salvation Army May Help Ex-Prisoners", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 3 June 1935, "Ex-Prisoners Not Wanted by Local Employers", The Straits Times, 8 March 1940, "Assisting Ex-Prisoners", and *The Straits Times*, 16 March 1940, "Help for Families of Men Sent to Gaol".

[135] See *The Straits Times*, 9 June 1935, "Need to Co-ordinate Relief Work in Singapore", *The Straits Times*, 15 June 1935, "Urgent Need of the Unemployed".

[136] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 13 January 1938, "Industrial Plan Needed for the Workless in Singapore". To illustrate, Lord noted that in December 1937, the fund assisted 687 cases (over 3,000 individuals), distributing $7,399 in cash, 32,700 kati of rice and $96.00 worth of milk.

There was unfortunately no further explanation of the basis on which the rates were calculated. For comparison, a report by the Chinese Affairs Secretariat indicated that in 1932, the average wage of a rubber factory worker was about $6.10 a month (about twenty cents per day), and that it was possible to live in Singapore on twenty-two cents a day.[137] An able-bodied female seeking refuge in the Salvation Army's home in 1936 or 1937 recalled receiving $10 for a month: $7 for food, and the rest for additional expenses. This came up to about thirty-three cents per day.[138] In 1938, the daily wage was forty-five and thirty-five cents for a male and a female rubber tapper respectively, with food and lodging provided.[139]

The relief rates were well below average daily wages, and presumably subsistence levels. This approach was deliberate. Upon taking over the Rotary relief fund in 1935. Lord had warned that the fund was an "interim" measure, "primarily for the alleviation of the unemployed clerical classes…." The "Fund", he cautioned, "… cannot stretch to a system of Old Age Pensions for the Aged or Poor Relief for an unlimited number of cripples and diseased and decrepits".[140] The amount of financial aid that could be given was limited by the "small-ness" of the fund, which was fine by Lord because he felt it was "wise only to give sufficient to maintain bare sustenance, thereby leaving a margin for personal initiative and effort at supplementing this allowance".[141]

Three years later in 1938, Lord's stance shifted ever so slightly but significantly. A core group of unemployed clerks had remained in distress and in need of continuous relief. In addition, through the Silver Jubilee Fund', they "discovered" an increasing number of applications coming from a group of "decrepits, aged people and widows"; in other words, a "permanent army of distressed".[142] For those still healthy and hence employable, Lord proposed some form of an industrial program to absorb the excess labor. He also suggested that firms could assist in providing apprenticeships for youths as well as retraining programs

[137] Huff, "Entitlements, Destitution, and Emigration in the 1930s", p. 305.
[138] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo. Women Through the Years: Economic & Family Lives. Accession Number: 000371. Interviewed in 1983. Reel 5 (of 26).
[139] Coelho, "Old Man on Public Assistance", p. 46. Author cited information from C. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas, 1838-1949* (New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, 1951).
[140] *The Straits Times*, 31 October 1935, "How Workless Are Given Money and Food".
[141] *The Straits Times*, 31 October 1935, "How Workless Are Given Money and Food". For the month of October, the fund received 483 applications, of which 308 were successful (about 64%). Chinese and Eurasians formed the majority of applications, with Indians coming a distant third.
[142] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 13 January 1938, "Industrial Plan Needed for the Workless in Singapore".

for older workers. Lord had no ready answer for the "unemployables", but observed that "a competent social survey" could help in addressing these issues via social legislation.

The broader point to take away is less the actual actions taken (or not taken), and more the fact that social issues were being deliberately and openly discussed, with moreover proposals made based on actual work, such as relief distribution. Through its actions, the Salvation Army, along with the Rotary Club (acting more as a public awareness forum), heralded a new approach to social welfare. It was coherent, organized, and scientific, as proposals were based on solid ground work and the statistical data produced from such work. This was in contrast to the earlier looser, almost ad hoc, responses to social distress. The Salvation Army's inclusive approach, giving aid regardless of creed or nationality, also contrasted with social services developed along communitarian and religious lines. Its proactiveness moreover in tackling social ills was at odds with the general reluctance of the colonial state (and society) to take decisive action. On the eve of the Japanese invasion in December 1941, the Salvation Army was well-established. It was managing five institutions in Singapore: A Women and Girls' Industrial Home in late 1935,[143] a Boys' Industrial Home in 1936 and a remand home for boys in 1937,[144] a hostel for discharged prisoners in 1938,[145] and a children's home in 1939.[146] The girls' and boys' homes in particular had objective of ensuring a future for their youthful residents through education and vocational training.[147]

In the course of discharging its service, the Salvation Army became the acknowledged leader in matters dealing with social issues in Singapore. Its officers administered and

[143] See for an overview of the home: *The Straits Times*, 15 December 1935, "New Home For Women In Singapore", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 16 December 1935, "New Home for Destitute Women in Singapore", *The Straits Times*, 16 December 1935, "Home For Women In Need", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 25 November 1936, "Women's Industrial Home Opened By Mrs. Small", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 7 August 1937, Industrial Home Moves".

[144] The industrial home opened first in November 1936. The remand home was added as a separate extension to the original home sometime in early 1939. See *The Straits Times*, 20 August 1936, "Boys' Home in Singapore", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 21 August 1936, "Home for Destitute Boys in Singapore", *The Straits Times*, 29 November 1936, "Rescuing Boys from The Streets of Singapore", *The Straits Times*, 28 October 1937, "New Remand Home for Boys", *The Straits Times*, 19 December 1937, "Remand Home for Boys to Open at New Year".

[145] The hostel was located at Race Course Road, and housed up to thirty persons. *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 1 June 1938, "Salvation Army to Open Hostel", and *The Straits Times*, 5 June 1938, "Ex-Prisoners".

[146] *The Straits Times*, 15 January 1939, "Salvation Army to Open New Children's Home".

[147] For detailed information on how homes were ran and general objectives, see *The Straits Times*, 9 October 1938, "How Industrial and Remand Homes Boys Are Trained", *The Straits Times*, 19 January 1939, "Salvation Army Scheme to Train Domestics", *The Straits Times*, 22 March 1939, "Salvation Army's Work for Distressed Women". *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 10 May 1940, "Women Who Have Found Protection in "Home"", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 24 October 1940, "Women's Home Run by Salvation Army".

investigated applications to the Silver Jubilee Fund. It acted as a coordinating agency between various charitable groups and government, working especially closely with the Rotary Club. The organization's deliberate focus on sections of Singapore society, which otherwise did not receive frequent attention, gave the Salvation Army an authority not easily challenged. Its officers were not shy in sharing their opinions publicly. For instance, Lord voiced his disappointment in the lack of progress in acquiring support for the boys' industrial home, hence delaying its opening until November 1936.[148] Through its work with Singapore society, the Salvation Army positioned itself as an authoritative commentator on the social issues of the day with the experience and knowledge to propose changes. In 1938, it spoke out on the need for a different legal system to treat juveniles.[149] Through its work, the Salvation Army raised public awareness on the plight of at-risk women, the potential fate of youths in poverty, and the probable need for institutional care for the destitute and the decrepit.[150]

A Personal Insight: Tan Beng Neo

The memories of Tan Beng Neo, a local officer of the Salvation Army, are a useful complement to the above. They not only give an intimate account of the Salvation Army's prewar work and a personal perspective on the impact of the organization's presence, but also an account of someone who had received help from the organization. Beng Neo was born in

[148] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 21 August 1936, "Home for Destitute Boys in Singapore". The home was eventually opened in November 1936. It was located at Kim Keat Road (in the current Balestier / Whampoa area).

[149] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 18 July 1938, "Special Court for Juvenile Offenders".

[150] The Salvation Army with the Child Welfare Society brought to light the inadequacy of hospital beds and medical facilities for babies in *The Straits Times*, 13 March 1938, "Singapore's Underfed Babies". It also highlighted the growing need to care for vagrants in Singapore in *The Straits Times*, 28 January 1941, "'Colony' For Decrepits in Singapore", and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 28 January 1941, "Institution for Vagrants Needed in Singapore". Its expertise in social work and social services, as well as the institutional aim to expand into Malaya, led to surveys of social needs in Malacca and Selangor: see *The Straits Times*, 6 December 1939, "'Chronic Poverty" Does Exist in Kuala Lumpur", and *The Straits Times*, 8 December 1940, "Destitution and Poverty in Malacca". It also worked with the prisons service in the aftercare of discharged prisoners, and along with the Rotary Club and the Straits Chinese British Association, with the police on the matter of unemployed Straits Chinese youths – see *The Straits Times*, 13 January 1940, "Singapore Boys Lured into Secret Societies". (This issue arose from a memorandum by the Superintendent of Police, which pointed out that an increasing number of youths were not employable despite a basic education in English and growing concerns that they would turn to illicit activities in their spare time. The proposed solution by the Rotary Club was the establishment of youth clubs to provide leadership and vocational training, as well as a space with activities to absorb free time. See *The Straits Times*, 22 February 1940, "Rotary to Investigate Boys' Club Movement", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 18 August 1938, "Insufficient Schools for The Boys of Singapore").

Singapore on 3 October 1914, in an attap shack along Alexander Road. According to the Chinese calendar, 1914 was the year of the tiger and hence was slightly inauspicious. Beng Neo's paternal grandmother said (according to Beng Neo): "Give it away. She's no good.... You better give it away. She'll bring bad luck to the family...." As Beng Neo was the firstborn, her mother refused. Over the years, the family moved several times, including once to escape the violence of the Sepoy Mutiny in 1915.[151] The mother gave birth to another seventeen children in total. She "had a baby practically every year", including several stillborn babies. She died young, aged forty-two.[152]

By then, Beng Neo was eighteen and was working - against her father's wishes - at the General Hospital at Outram Road as a nurse. There was no formal training and Beng Neo learned on the job. Unfortunately, she fell ill, and had to drop out of the four-year course. She went home to stay with her parents, but a row with her father led her to run away from home. Beng Neo did not state the year, but she recalled her former school principal brought her to the Salvation Army at Paterson Road, where it had opened a home for "victimized women" in late 1935. "After running away from home, I had no money. I had five or six dollars only. And they took me to Paterson Road and ... gave me a bed".[153] Beng Neo was perhaps one of the earliest residents of the Women's Industrial Home (located along Paterson Road). She recalled:

> It was a house belonging, I think, to Dr. Lim Boon Keng. An attap roof, but a huge house. I remember one of the dormitories … four beds. One was an Indian girl with a lot of curly hair and very short and she looked so funny in bed. And one was another Chinese girl. She kept on talking to herself and laughing. And I said, "Good Lord! Have I landed in a mental hospital?" Because the Salvation Army officers were all in white, you see. And I had no idea who they were. So I couldn't sleep. I was very upset. I couldn't sleep…. I was there a year.[154]

[151] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 1. "A lot of them was killed, Europeans especially were killed. Some were in the drain and all that. After a few days, the placed stinked [sic]. I remember my mother carried.... She said, "I carried you". No, my father carried me. And my mother had some bundles of clothing and food and some of the neighbors, mostly women and children, all marched from Alexandra Road to town because there was no transport. It was very terrifying". Beng Neo was less than two years old when the Sepoy Mutiny occurred, so her memories might have been her mother's. The mutiny involved soldiers from the Indian Army's 5th Light Infantry Regiment (four of eight companies), lasted seven days, and left forty-seven dead.
[152] By the time Beng Neo's father died in 1982, he had two wives, twenty-one children, fifty grandchildren, and twenty-two great-grandchildren.
[153] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 5.
[154] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 5.

Beng Neo stayed at Paterson Road roughly from late 1935 to 1936 before she started a year-long midwifery course at Kandang Kerbau Hospital. The Salvation Army paid her fees in return for an agreement to work for them. The hospital had intended to hire her after she completed her course, but the Salvation Army had other plans for her. Over time, Beng Neo became a Salvationist, and in April 1939, she and six other local Chinese, were the first graduates of the Salvation Army's training program of local officers.[155] Until the outbreak of the Second World War, Beng Neo worked primarily in the nursery section of the Women's Industrial Home, taking care of abandoned babies, or the babies of mothers who were unable to care for them. She also worked with senior officers, handing out copies of *War Cry*, the organization's newsletter, visiting female prison inmates to check on their well-being as well as that of their children if any, and go on evening patrols in known red-light districts to check on street-walkers. Beng Neo's oral history provides insights into some of the female inmates:

> We visited the prison at least once a week, the female prison and translated for her [Colonel Bertha Grey] because there're lots of women caught … prostituting, soliciting on the streets or … making *samsu* [cheap liquor made from caramel, sugar, and water]. I remember we had all the children and the girls in our home because the mother was serving a prison sentence for making *samsu*. And while she was there, you see, we visited the home and found that nobody was looking after the children. So we took the children. Then we had to visit the mother and told her that the children were alright and safe with us. And when she is discharged, she could come and take them home.[156]

The Salvation Army also provided aftercare services, aiding ex-prisoners with job training so they could make an honest living:

> After the woman was discharged, she learned to make brooms. So Colonel Grey used to buy brooms from her to help her along and occasionally you know, would bring something for her and see how she was getting on. But the woman could not speak any English.[157]

Hence, Beng Neo was brought along on these home visits and street patrols to help with the communication between the Salvation Army officer and their clients. Before long, Beng Neo

[155] *The Straits Times*, 3 April 1939, "New Salvation Army Officers" and 4 April 1939, "Salvation Army's New Officers". The articles reported "seven Chinese cadets, who have been in training at the Tank Road Training Garrison for the past nine months, will be dedicated at a service at the Tank Road Hall… Messrs. Koh Liang Seah (assigned to Siglap section), Yeok Kok Chin (Boys' Industrial Home), Sim Wee Lee (Penang) and Tan Koon Hoi (After-care), Misses Chua Yam Neo (women's special work), Tan Beng Neo (Balestier Road Corps), Lim Siok Chin (Central Corps, Tank Road)".
[156] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 7.
[157] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 7.

was familiar with the "bad areas", the red-light districts, in Singapore: "At one period I could tell you which are the bad houses in Desker Road, Maude Road, Jalan Besar, and all that". Her oral history gives a vivid description of her encounters with street-walkers.

> [Question on how they approached the girls]. Oh, [Colonel Grey] says, "How are you now? Today are you alright? Have you earned a lot of money? Why don't you choose another type of … way of earning? Why don't you come to our home and we train you how to work?" The girl would say, "Well, I earn more money at night than I could earn anywhere else for a month" ... You know, we had quite a chit-chat with them.
>
> [Question on whether there were any unpleasant incidents]. No, not really.[158] If they don't like us, they walked away when they see us coming…. Well, we don't chase after them…. Some of they would smile and talk to us for a few minutes…. They don't really come [joined up with the Salvation Army] because some of them are hardened cases, really hardened cases. Only way we could get at them is when they are in prison.[159]

Beng Neo's and the Salvation Army's street encounters exploits were recorded and published in the newspapers in 1940.[160] By then, the Salvation Army was preparing to support the war effort. There were growing concerns about prostitution (more accurately, the risk of infected soldiers) as the garrison defending Singapore increased, and also in the provision of amenities and recreational facilities for soldiers stationed on the island.[161] In just five years, the Salvation Army had established itself as the leading social service agency in Singapore and Malaya, providing services and giving aid on a basis that was as broad and inclusive as possible.

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[158] She did remark that she "did not like … selling *War Cry*'s at night. We go to the restaurants and all that, and the some of the men are drunk. They come out from the restaurants, very tipsy and trying to grab hold of you and all that. I usually run a mile".

[159] Beng Neo went on to describe the legal situation. Prostitution was only illegal if the girl was caught soliciting. "If the man goes to the prostitute willingly, you can't do much. If they are found trying to stop a man and trying to entice the man to go to her room, then that is illegal. But if she wants to do what she wanted with her body, nobody can say anything".

[160] *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 9 April 1940, ""Army" Women Interview Prostitutes", and *The Straits Times*, 9 April 1940, "No Third Party in Local Prostitution".

[161] This began sometime in late 1939, and broadly included the collection of reading materials and leisure / sporting equipment, spaces for recreation, and setting up mobile canteens. See *The Straits Times*, 29 September 1939, "Helping the Soldiers", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 16 May 1940, "Salvation Army's Work for Fighting Forces", The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 19 November 1940, "More Books, Radio Sets, Gramophones Wanted", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 3 March 1941, "Entertainment of Service Men", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, 29 May 1941, "New Institute for Services in Malaya".

On the Cusp of Change

Perhaps it was the circumstances of the Great Depression that exposed, rather brutally, social distresses that might otherwise be hidden. In Singapore's colonial society, reluctant as it was to proactively provide for the well-being of the less fortunate, there was an opening for a decisive organization like the Salvation Army to step in and take charge. The colonial government seemed more than happy to allow the Salvation Army to take the lead, as long as the latter did not put too heavy a burden on revenue. Singapore society, or at least the English-speaking sections of it, also seemed willing to let the Salvation Army bear the burden, much to the chagrin of a *Singapore Free Press* editorial, unimpressed by the speed the responsibilities of the prisoner aftercare association were relinquished to the Salvation Army. Nor was the author convinced the latter could do much with a "community which bothered its head for two minutes about what happens to men when they leave prison...."[162]

This is not to say that the Salvation Army was the only organization capable of addressing social needs in prewar Singapore. The religious bodies, charitable societies, clans and communal association, and other forms of social organizations and groups (such as the family) continued to play a significant role tending to various social needs. The Salvation Army and the Rotary Club complemented, not supplanted, such work and activity. The Salvation Army did collaborate with several of them, such as the Rotary Club, various government bodies like the Chinese Protectorate and the prisons service, and the Child Welfare Society. But its attempts at reform were not always welcomed. The Anglican Church for instance expressed reservations about the implications of the Salvation Army's work, particularly its centralizing tendencies. The Church was perturbed by the suggestion (made by an editorial) of a central controlling committee, and preferred a diversity of sources of aid, with aid given in small doses to avoid double dipping.[163]

Such reservations were perhaps unsurprising given the aggressive pro-activeness of the Salvation Army, displayed moreover in a situation where the development of social

[162] *The Singapore Free Press*, 19 June 1935, "Singapore Pilates". "Pilates" was a reference to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who supposedly washed his hands in a public attempt to absolve himself of any responsibility regarding the trial and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The editorial was thoroughly scathing of Singapore society, and doubted the Salvation Army could do more without more support.

[163] See *The Straits Times*, 28 June 1935, "Church Opinions on Organisation of Charity", which was in response to an editorial in *The Straits Times*, 22 June 1935, "Relief Reform". The editorial had reviewed existing aid agencies in Singapore, and called for a committee "in which all data can be centralized and which will meet regularly to sift that data". This would then "avoid overlapping between all these agencies, to prevent abuse of charity, and to ensure the widest possible distribution of aid…." The editorial did not mention the assistance, if any, provided by communal associations.

services had until its appearance been uneven and overly reactive. Compared to the Salvation Army's dynamism and broad-based approach that cut across ethnic lines, earlier social services and institutions appeared insular and ponderous. The Salvation Army's attempts to address the root causes of social ills, rather than merely treat the symptoms, also give a sense of "permanence", at least relative to the transient nature of Singapore's migrant society. Hence, the presence and work of the Salvation Army and the Rotary Club was significant. There is no denying that the sense of crisis, precipitated by a prolonged economic slump, amplified their importance in Singapore history. Nevertheless, when contrasted with the reluctance of colonial society to assume responsibility for the general well-being of society, their broad-based approach was novel. It also provided a suitable model for financial relief, youth welfare, and social issues in general. On the eve of the Second World War, the work of the Salvation Army and the Rotary Club presented the potential for a coherent and organized approach to social services.

It is interesting to imagine, purely as an academic exercise, the possible trajectory of Singapore's social welfare history had the war not intervened. It is unlikely the Salvation Army or the Rotary Club would have made progress in fostering a collective sense of responsibility within a society with diverse nationalities and divergent loyalties. There was no reason or motivation at all to imagine that individuals in Singapore society – as it was then – were beholden to each other. Excess labor, like Augustin Gomez, was repatriated. Others, like Valentine Frois, relied on either their families or extended communities for assistance, or like Wong, on their own resources. Financial relief, even for domiciled Europeans, was not as forthcoming as anticipated. Each community, indeed each individual, had to fend for themselves. The absence of war and the accompanying sense of crisis, so necessary for social and political change, would have been absent. The impetus for change and a new colonial welfare policy came from external sources and circumstances.

Metropolitan Interlude: Colonial Plans for Social Welfare

On 8 December 1941, Japanese troops landed on the beaches of southern Thailand and Kota Bahru in Kelantan, Malaya, to begin their invasion of British Malaya. By then, British colonial policy had changed significantly. Chapter 1 has provided an overview of the circumstances and impetus leading to the new policy of development and welfare. The passing of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act during a time when Britain stood alone

against the Axis powers was a considerable statement of intent. The fall of Singapore, and the humiliation of defeat in the Far East, only served to heighten imperial anxieties and quickened the pace of change.

Planning for postwar Malaya and Singapore began in earnest in 1943, following a palpable upturn in fortunes following the military victories, the entrance of new allies, and the publication of the Beveridge Plan. In keeping with the mood of the times, there was a determination to resist a return to the prewar status quo.[164] By 1944, the Colonial Office had already decided that after the period of military administration, a new political unit called the Malayan Union would replace the disparate politico-administrative units of the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States, and Unfederated Malay States. Singapore, formerly administered together with Penang, Malacca and other smaller territories under the umbrella of the Straits Settlements, was to be governed separately as a crown colony.[165]

Wartime Planning

The Eastern Department of the Colonial Office oversaw the "big picture", while matters concerning post-war administration preoccupied joint War Office-Colonial Office planning units.[166] To avoid earlier clashes between civil administration and military priorities during the fighting in Burma, the War Office created a Civil Affairs directorate to differentiate civil from military matters. The directorate oversaw planning units to pave the way for a smoother transition to civil administration as well as to take into account colonial policy at an early stage.[167] The Malayan Planning Unit was one such unit established. It began in early 1943 as a series of informal committee meetings between the War and Colonial Offices, before it was officially formalized in July of the same year. The Malayan Planning Unit was technically part of the War Office, but its staff and overall policy came from the colonial service. Ralph Hone was appointed Chief Planner and Chief Civil Affairs

[164] A. J. Stockwell, "Colonial planning during World War II: The case of Malaya". *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*. 1974; 2(3): p. 338.
[165] F. S. V. Donnison, *British Military Administration in the Far East 1943-46* (London: H.M.S.O., 1956), p. 137. See also Albert Lau, *The Malayan Union Controversy 1942-1948* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), A. J. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics during the Malayan Union Experiment, 1945-1948* (Kuala Lumpur: Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society Monograph No. 8, 1979); and M. R. Stenson, "The Malayan Union and the Historians". *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1969), pp. 344-354.
[166] C. M. Turnbull, "British Planning for Post-war Malaya". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1974), pp. 239-254.
[167] Donnison, *British Military Administration*, pp. 36-37, and Stockwell, "Colonial Planning", p. 338.

Officer-designate. Hone reported directly to Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia Command. Formerly from the colonial legal service in Africa, he also had experience working in a military administration in the Middle East. The Malayan Planning Unit (later hyphenated with "Civil Affairs") was in many ways the bureaucratic arm of the Colonial Office, responsible for the preparation of post-operations administration as well as the implementation of colonial policy.[168]

The War and Colonial Offices accepted the responsibility to provide relief. The official history of the British Military Administration in the Far East notes that the "assumption by … military authorities … of responsibility for the relief of civilians was entirely without precedent...."[169] Military authorities were under no legal obligation to provide relief within their or their allies' territory. But relief was nonetheless deemed necessary. They prevented the outbreaks of diseases and social unrest (so that military forces would not be diverted from their main task of fighting a war). They also ensured that the incoming administrations were seen as better propositions compared to those of the Japanese or Japanese-related. Relief was mostly in kind, as it was assumed that the injection of cash into a broken economy with few goods and services would be detrimental to postwar administration.[170]

In November 1943, the British commissioned a working party to calculate the relief requirements for Burma, British Borneo, Hong Kong and Malaya.[171] The Young Working Party, named after its chairman Sir Hubert Young, produced six-monthly estimates for a period of two years for the following categories of supplies: food, agricultural supplies, medical supplies, soap, clothing and footwear, communal requirements, individual household requirements, and newsprint. In their calculations, the working party assumed that "only so much of relief requirements should be imported as would prevent disease and unrest", and

[168] In addition to more scholarly examinations, see for personal recollections and insights Oswald Wellington Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore* (London: Benn, 1950). Gilmour was a former employee of the Singapore Municipal Commission. He managed to leave before Singapore fell to the Japanese. As a member of the MPU, he was part of the advance party that reach Singapore in September 1945, tasked to restore and maintain utility services (electricity, water, etc.). The Malayan Planning Unit had the following 'Sections' – General Administration and Political, Legal and Judicial, Chinese Affairs, Public Health and Medical, Police Prisons and Fire-Brigade, Technical Services, Supplies, Rationing, Trade and Industry, Finance, Press and Publicity, Custodian of Property, Agricultural, Veterinary and Forestry, Land Mines and Surveys, Education, and Labour and Personnel – with many more sub-sections as the Unit expanded. See also Lau's *The Malayan Union* for a brief overview of the unit's activities.

[169] Donnison, *British Military Administration*, p. 237

[170] Donnison, *British Military Administration*, p. 237

[171] NAS, CO 852/665/1: Relief and Rehabilitation Estimates. CO 852 files are available in the NUS Central Library

that in the following eighteen months, there should be ample supplies to "restore the normal activity of the community and to enable it to take its part in producing for civilian relief and the war effort".[172] In other words, planners assumed that administration of reoccupied territories would take place while military action continued. This led to a more conservative estimation of supplies needed by territories and populations near or within fighting zones, which posed challenges for the returning British.

The greater concern of a military administration was the management of the "human debris" of war, in other words the refugees and other people displaced by fighting.[173] Hence, military planning focused on the establishment and supply of temporary camps to properly house and feed refugees, and operations to locate and transport those forcibly displaced by the Japanese.[174] The singular example here is the mass of humanity forced to work on the infamous "Death Railway" in Thailand and Burma. On a smaller but no less significant scale, the Javanese in Singapore formed the largest displaced nationality in Southeast Asia during the war. The sections set up within military administrations to address such problems were usually called Relief and Labour Departments. In Singapore, it was known as the Refugee and Displaced Persons Section. The official record shows that the Malayan Planning Unit was not immediately concerned with distress relief or social welfare. Rather, its planners focused the more urgent tasks of reoccupation. The manner in which the unit was organized illustrated this preoccupation, such as Military Government, Finance, Police, Labour, Supplies, Medical, Legal and Works.[175]

Long-term Colonial Policy for Social Welfare

Long-term planning was not neglected. The Malayan Planning Unit drafted a series of policy directives in consultation with the Colonial Office. Each directive provided general guidelines to restart government, economy, and society, and to guide postwar administration in the Malayan Union and Singapore, Hong Kong and British Borneo.[176] The social welfare

[172] Donnison, *British Military Administration*, p. 243.
[173] Donnison, *British Military Administration*, p. 271. The idea of "human debris" was also referred to in the first annual report of the Social Welfare Department.
[174] Donnison, *British Military Administration*, p. 272.
[175] Donnison, *British Military Administration*, p. 141. See also Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, pp. 25-26.
[176] NUSCL, CO 865/18 (Malayan Policy Directives Working Committee). Hone to Gent, 29 October 1943. Hone cited the following text: "It was agreed that the Burma and Colonial Offices should provide the War Office as soon as possible with directives (political, administrative and economic) on long-term [emphasis in text] policy for Burma and Malaya; administration during the military period should so far as possible confirm to these directives". Hone initially listed eighteen areas: Malayan Citizenship; Chinese Policy; Public Services;

policy directive for the Malayan Union and Singapore called for the establishment of a Social Welfare Advisory Committee made up of government officials and non-government representatives. This committee was to stimulate and coordinate social welfare work.[177] It went on to state that the "Government should appoint a Senior Social Welfare Officer and any Welfare Staff should be under his direction", and that the "efforts of these Officers and Committees should be directed towards improving the general well-being of the community in its widest sense". All agencies and organizations, official and unofficial, "should play their part" in a "co-operative effort" to coordinate their programs in a "general plan for social welfare, based on the ascertained needs of the community and so constructed as to give proper weight to the requirements of both urban and rural areas".[178]

The anticipated advisory committee was a "convenient means" of bringing together and focusing the efforts of "public spirited members of the community" on social welfare work. The directive concluded with further instructions to conduct a census as soon as conditions permitted, and to revive and update (for both the Malayan Union and Singapore) former Straits Settlements legislation on the protection of women, girls, and children in general. It also called attention to memos deemed relevant for social welfare, such as on penal administration and nutrition, and a draft report on social welfare (indicated as "Misc. 504"). Those were to provide "guidance on certain important aspects of social welfare work which are not the special interests or concern of other Departments of Government such as Education, Medical, Agriculture, Co-operative and Labour".[179]

The earliest drafts, dated late 1943, seemed unable to clearly articulate the scope of social welfare work. The entire section on "Scope of Social Welfare" was left blank in a second draft.[180] Drafters focused on the structures rather than the substance. They focused on

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Finance; Rubber; Tin; Primary Production other than Mineral; Lands, Mines and Survey; Social Welfare; Medical and Health; Education; Labour and Legislation; Transport; Post and Telecommunications; Electricity; Ports and Harbours; Broadcasting; Co-operative Department. Opium was added as the nineteenth item. For development of these directives, see also NUSCL, CO 825/47/12 (Far Eastern reconstruction: long term policy directives in Malaya); CO 825/47/13 (Far Eastern reconstruction: long term policy in Malaya; organization of government departments); CO 825/47/1 (Far Eastern reconstruction: post-war housing in Singapore); CO 825/47/17 (Long term policy directives in Malaya: social welfare).

[177] I am using the version circulated after the British reoccupied Singapore. NAS, BMA (CH) 27/45 and certain folders in NUSCL, CO 273. This version is identical to the latest draft I have located, dated 10 August 1944 in CO 825/47/12. The earliest draft found is in CO 825/43/35 (dated November 1943), and versions of latter drafts can be found in 825/47/17 and CO 865/18.

[178] Social Welfare Policy Directive.

[179] The Colonial Office memorandums referred to were the United Nations Food Conference and Colonial nutrition policy, the Memorandum on modern conceptions of penal administration (prepared for the Controller of Development and Welfare in the West Indies), and "Social Security for Colonial Territories" (CM No 5 June 1944). Except for the final one, I am unable to identify conclusively these memos and the draft report.

[180] NUSCL, CO 825/43/35.

establishing committees, to be mindful of existing policies (by reading Colonial Office memos and reports), or to revive prewar legislation that was relevant to welfare work. Early drafts even included a section on "Town Planning", which was discarded later.[181] The final version of the draft indicated that the Colonial Office did not have a concrete idea of what social welfare meant. Social welfare became vaguely the "general well being of the community in its widest sense", and specific issues not already dealt with by existing government services, such as child welfare, protection of the vulnerable, penal administration, physical health (other than treating medical conditions).

This understanding followed closely Lucy Mair's description of social welfare in *Welfare in the British Colonies*, as discussed in Chapter 1. The suggestions in the social welfare policy directive mirrored related activities elsewhere in the British Empire. In the West Indies and African colonies, social welfare advisory committees succeeded the original nutrition committees established during the interwar years. By the latter years of the war, Social Welfare Officers were active in the West Indies, where committees represented different territories. Each was presided over by a Social Welfare Officer and consisted of representatives from education, health, labor, and other related social services.[182] Africa had different concerns, and hence a different set-up. Largely rural except for a few highly-urbanized centers, the focus was more on the improvement of village life and centered on education and health, as well as agricultural matters.[183] A similar situation occurred in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where Rural Development Officers took the lead in establishing a variety of services crosscutting education, health, and industry.[184] There was no equivalent Social Welfare Service, like the Education or Health Services. The policy directive fell short of creating a social welfare department. Social welfare work in the British Empire was conducted primarily through appointed individuals. They took on a supervisory or coordinating role (or both), overseeing a committee of representatives to work with government departments and organizations that were concerned with social issues. Given the absence of precedent, there was little incentive – and resistance even – within the Colonial Office to the idea of a stand-alone welfare department in the colonies.

[181] NUSCL, CO 825/43/35. There were differences between the policy directives for the Malayan Union and Singapore on the one hand, and Hong Kong on the other. The latter focused more on the mui tsai issue, and retained a section on town planning. Social welfare work in Hong Kong was also connected to different government departments, such as Secretariat for Chinese Affairs, the Urban Council, and the Port Authority.
[182] Mair, *Welfare*, pp. 103-109.
[183] Mair, *Welfare*, pp. 109-113.
[184] Mair, *Welfare*, pp. 113-115.

A Social Welfare Department for Singapore?

The mood of the times however did initiate a limited but intense discussion for the postwar future of Malaya and Singapore. The first instance that a social welfare department was mooted was during wartime discussions concerning future policy for labor.[185] On 11 September 1943, Patrick McKerron of the Malayan Planning Unit (and a Malayan Civil Service veteran) suggested that future labor policies should assume a joint government department for both Singapore and Malaya. His suggestion provoked a long, cautious, but somewhat sympathetic file minute by Leslie Monson, the Principal of the Colonial Office's Eastern Department.[186] (Interestingly, this was a moment when the Colonial Office and former "men on the ground", the Malayan Civil Service veterans or officers who had worked in Malaya for extended periods, interacted directly on a regular basis).[187]

Monson's minute was primarily an elucidation of labor issues and administration before the war. Briefly, prewar colonial administration had managed labor issues along racial lines. The Labour Department handled all matters concerning Indian (mostly Tamil) workers, while the Chinese Protectorate became the de facto government agency for the Chinese community. McKerron's suggestion moreover dovetailed with prevailing opinions within the Colonial Office to plan for a new postwar future for Malaya. Indeed, the idea of a unified department paralleled the institutional policy to do away with the divisions that had defined Malaya's and Singapore's colonial society (and presumably led to the defeat by the Japanese).[188] A joint government department to combine resources for common objectives was hence attractive. Still, Monson remained cautious, preferring a "wait-and-see" policy. There were simply not enough officials to allow the proposed military administration to function at the prewar level, let alone the civil government that was to take over. Monson was also concerned about unanticipated implications, such as the strategic need for labor for

[185] NUSCL, CO 825/43/35. See file minutes. Discussion was between W. B. L. Monson, J. J. Paskin, K. W. Blaxter, Orde-Brown (Labour Advisor), and Audrey Richards of the Social Services Department.
[186] NUSCL, CO 825/43/35. File minute by W. B. L. Monson, 15 September 1943
[187] Stockwell, "Colonial Planning".
[188] Even before the war, there had been considerable sentiment to "sweep away" the Chinese Protectorate in favor of a unified labor department. Such a tendency was substantial enough that it drew "frequent and considered advice" from Shenton Thomas, Governor of the Straits Settlements and the United Kingdom High Commissioner to the Federated and Un-Federated Malay States, to keep the Chinese Protectorate. See NUSCL, CO 865/47. Minute by E. Gent, 22 June 1943. The suggestion emerged earlier in 1937/38. See CO 273/50336/37 (no. 26) and CO 273/50336/38 (no. 11). Also noted by Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 24.

postwar reconstruction, and the political implications of continued reliance on Chinese and Indian labor in the postwar period.

The prospect of a social welfare department emerged when Monson pondered on the implications of unifying labor functions under a single department. One was where to house the non-labor functions the Protector of Chinese and his Assistant Protectors performed on a regular basis, such as the protection of women and children, and other daily *taijin* duties. Monson warned:

> One point must not be overlooked – these departments in the past, particularly the Chinese Protectorate, dealt with matters not strictly related to the labour code, such as, the protection of women and young persons. What is to become of this work if a new joint Labour Dept. is formed? It might well be convenient for the same Chinese or Tamil speaking officer "in the field" to handle both sides of the work. This suggests that the ultimate aim should be a joint Department of Social Welfare, covering both labour and other social work which would have separate divisions for the formulation of policy on Indian or plantation labour, on Chinese labour and on social questions.[189]

The proposed social welfare department was the suppose endpoint of a process bringing together functions and services pertaining to labor matters. Monson's colleagues in the Colonial Office agreed to let the Malayan Planning Unit proceed on the assumption of a unified labor department. On the matter of a social welfare department, some of them were ambivalent, preferring the wait-and-see approach. The new Social Service Department however was less conservative, in particular Dr. Audrey Richards. Richards was an anthropologist from the London School of Economics, and had studied the role of women and the family in northern Rhodesia.[190] Rising through the ranks of the Colonial Office because of the war (and its impact on the supply of male staff), Richards was also instrumental in the establishment of the Social Welfare Advisory Committee in 1942.[191]

Responding to the cautiousness of her male (and more senior) counterparts, Richards wondered whether postponing the proposed social welfare department was "perhaps not rather reversing the tendency that can be seen in other territories".[192] She observed prophetically:

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[189] NUSCL, CO 825/43/35. Minute by W. B. L. Monson, 15 September 1943
[190] Lewis, *Empire State-Building*, p. 71.
[191] Lewis, *Empire State-Building*, p. 75.
[192] NUSCL, CO 825/43/35. Minute by Audrey Richards, 27 September 1943. She might have been overstating the case when she mentioned "in other territories". Her comment drew a response from Orde Browne, the Adviser on Colonial Labour to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. He indicated his suggestion for postponement was only for the "early phase" while fighting was still on-going.

> [T]he disadvantage of setting up a Labour Department first is that in effect you are creating vested interests so that it will be difficult afterwards to introduce the wider Social Welfare Department. Labour officers will have in effect to take on general welfare duties ... and they may not like being asked to hand them over to a Welfare Section later on. Moreover, the personnel selected may not be so suitable for handling social welfare problems since it is usually the custom to appoint Trade Unionists to such posts and this tends to be rather a narrow type of training and one which does not give much practice in planning and co-ordinating different welfare movements.[193]

Richards pleaded, "Would it not be possible to appoint a Social Welfare Advisor now with one wing of his future department under him that is the Labour Department? The other wing could be added later. This would be somewhat similar to the Palestine set up which has a social welfare adviser and a Probation Department and a Welfare Department under him".[194] Richards was supported by K. W. Blaxter, her immediate superior in the Social Service Department. Anticipating that social welfare was to be a key part of metropolitan and colonial governments, he commented that it was "very desirable ... that we should consider how to bring "social welfare" into the picture in future arrangements for the administration of Malaya".[195] He also explained that the draft report on Juvenile Welfare in the Colonies, a "document on which we have hinged our approach to Colonial Governments in this matter..." contained general principles of social welfare.[196] At a later meeting, Blaxter appeared to temper his support for a stand-alone welfare department. Instead, he agreed to the "employment of welfare officers under the Labour Dept. and attached to special services, such as the Railways or the Docks, pending such arrangements as could be made for a Welfare Dept. in a more permanent administration".[197]

The discussion ended without any clear resolution, other than agreeing that social welfare was necessary (keeping in line with the new colonial policy, and the enthusiasm generated by the Beveridge Plan). From a purely administrative viewpoint, the Colonial Office's engagement with social welfare was mainly to deal with the consequences of changing the status quo, namely the political futures of Malaya and Singapore, and the place

[193] NUSCL, CO 825/43/35. Minute by Audrey Richards, 27 September 1943.
[194] NUSCL, CO 825/43/35. Minute by Audrey Richards, 27 September 1943. This is the only indication I can find of a social welfare department in the British Empire during the war.
[195] NUSCL, CO 825/43/35. Minute by K. W. Blaxter to J. J. Paskin, 2 October 1943.
[196] This explains the heavy emphasis on juvenile and youth welfare initiatives by the Singapore Department of Social Welfare after the war. See Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this study.
[197] NUSCL, CO 825/43/35. Minute by Monson, 11 October 1943. Blaxter also made a note against Monson's minute to suggest a "Social Welfare Adviser in the Secretariat". It is not clear what Secretariat he was referring to.

of the Chinese Protectorate and the Labour Department in those futures. The colonial state, unlike during the prewar period, was going to be involved in the provision of welfare services. That much was clear. Planners were however unable to clearly articulate a social welfare policy beyond a catch-all role of covering functions and services not already managed by other government departments. The following chapters will illustrate how quickly the British discovered the limits of a vague policy after they returned to Singapore and Malaya.

CHAPTER 3. WELFARE DURING WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

The first part of this chapter presents an overview of social conditions during the Japanese Occupation (1942 to 1945). After an initial period of confusion, life in Japanese-occupied Singapore continued. Law and order had to be re-established. Individuals still needed to find sources of income to support themselves and their families. Social services were needed more than ever, but the circumstances were decidedly more difficult to operate in. The second part of the chapter examines early British attempts to implement its new colonial policy of social welfare under the British Military Administration. The obstacles the returning British encountered significantly altered colonial plans, and (with the benefit of a longer perspective) also anticipated the issues to come after the initial period of military administration.

Social Welfare during the Japanese Occupation

The sub-heading above may come across as counter-intuitive. The Japanese occupation of Singapore has been presented largely as an oppressive and fearful period in Singapore history. Atrocities were committed against particular communities in Singapore, such as the British, perceived allies of the British (usually those who spoke English), and the Chinese. Incidents included the *sook ching* massacre, the worst known incident involving the Japanese military outside the Nanking massacre, and the reprisals against European internees and locals who aided them during the "Double Tenth" incident.[1] Life in general during the occupation was difficult. Singapore's economy, based very much on its staple port functions and entrepôt trade with its neighbors, could not properly function due to the war. This exacerbated unemployment, which was already substantial due to reluctance to work for the Japanese (unless desperate).

Attempts were made to restart government services, such as public works and education, in a bid to return normalcy to society. But for various reasons, Japanese military administration was unsystematic and ineffective, which in turn cultivated a society that

[1] *sook ching* (肃清) in Chinese means "purge through cleansing. The Japanese term for the event translates into "great inspection". See for a visual representation of the event, Liu Kang, *Za sui hua ji = Chop suey* (Singapore: Global Arts & Crafts Pte. Ltd., 2014; originally published in 1946). The "Double Tenth" incident refers to Japanese reprisals conducted on 10 October 1943. They were in response to Operation Jaywick, an operation carried out by the Allied Intelligence Bureau to destroy and to disrupt shipping in Keppel Harbor. Lee Geok Boi, *The Syonan Years: Singapore under Japanese Rule 1942-1945* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore; Epigram, c2005), pp. 105-116, and 229-230.

functioned on basic survival instincts.[2] After they returned, the British attributed the many postwar social ills to the consequences of the Japanese military occupation, such as the bloating of Singapore's population with refugees and displaced people, rampant malnutrition and diseases, shortages of food and other basic necessities, and a general breakdown in social order.[3]

There were attempts at restoring some semblance of normalcy and social order after the chaos and confusion of battle. The Japanese Central Military Administration, or the *Gunseikanbu*, replaced British colonial administration.[4] Throughout the occupation period the Japanese tried to keep the economy going by encouraging businesses to open.[5] Singapore proper was overseen by the *Tokubetusi*, or municipal administration. Within the *Tokubetusi*, there were various departments including one for social welfare.[6] In August 1942, Mamoru Shinozaki was designated Singapore's Chief Welfare Officer. He had been Chief Education Officer earlier, but even then, he had spent more time doing "welfare work", such as "receiving petitions, finding jobs for people, finding missing people, helping people back to their homes upcountry, distributing rice and sugar to the needy".[7]

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[2] Lee, *The Syonan Years*, p. 287.

[3] The Social Welfare report stated: "War, and the pestilence of the Japanese occupation, left a wake of human wreckage in South East Asia". The Education Department report described the period, "so far as concerned child education, was in the main one of suppression or distortion" (p. 2), and attributed "physical and mental strain and inevitable weakening" to "years of Japanese oppression". (p. 5). The Medical Department report stated: "[T]here is no doubt that preventive medicine was grossly neglected by the Japanese, while curative treatment was continued by the Government Asiatic Staff without adequate assistance from the Enemy Occupying Authority" (p. 1). It observed that the 130,382 recorded deaths between 1942 and 1945 far exceeded the 59,361 recorded for a similar span (1937 to 1940). In four months alone (July to October 1944), recorded deaths "were more than three times as numerous as in the years before the war…" (p. 1). The principal causes of death during the Japanese occupation were beri-beri (total from 1943 to 1945: 15,412, compared to 653 in 1937), infantile convulsions (10,808, to 1,792), pneumonia (8,705, to 1,851), tuberculosis (8,384, to 1,382), dysentery (5,156, to 200), malaria (5,337, to 428), and unspecified fevers (8,679 to 706). (p. 2). As a result, "The civil population was exceedingly under-nourished, malaria was rampant, beri-beri and other condition due to malnutrition affected a considerable number of inhabitants of the Island. Although the Japanese had done a certain amount of medical work, a great deal of important preventive and curative treatment had been grossly neglected". (p. 11).

[4] Translated into English as Military Administration Department, or MAD. Lee, *The Syonan Years*, pp. 138-139.

[5] See Lee, *The Syonan Years*, pp. 141-152, and Paul H. Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya: A Social and Economic History* (London: C. Hurst, 1998), chapter 6.

[6] The municipal administration included the following bureaus: General Affairs Bureau (Shomu-bu), Bureau of Welfare of People (Minsei-bu), Economic Bureau (Keisai-bu), and Undertaking Bureau ((Zigyo-bu). The Minsei-bui included the following departments: Promotion of Wellbeing of People (Kohsei-ka), Medical (Iryo-ka), Education (Kyoiku-ka), Health, (Boeki-ka), and Town Cleansing (Seisoh-ka). See Lee Ah Chai, "Singapore under the Japanese, 1942-1945" (Unpublished academic exercise – Dept. of History, University of Malaya, 1956), p. 8. Lee cited the *Syonan Sinbun*'s publication *The Good Citizen Guide*, published in Singapore in 1943. See also Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya*, chapter 3, and Lee, *The Syonan Years*, pp. 140-142.

[7] Mamoru Shinozaki, *My Wartime Experiences in Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1973), p. 53. Before the war, Shinozaki worked in the Japanese embassy in Singapore, and was imprisoned for espionage activities.

Rationalizing his part in the war three decades after, Shinozaki had an interesting take on his role as welfare officer: "The main duty of the welfare department was to look after the welfare of the local citizens".[8] This was a Japanese official who not only helped administered a conquered territory and its peoples, but had moreover knowingly helped his countrymen plan an attack on Singapore in 1940.[9] Shinozaki's humanitarian efforts during the occupation have been documented, particularly his rescue of many Chinese during the *sook ching* campaign.[10] Shinozaki also persuaded a seventy-two year old Dr. Lim Boon Keng to form and lead the Overseas Chinese Association. The Association was organized to "protect the Chinese community", mainly via the rescue of hundreds of detained Chinese and their family members on the pretext of staffing the organization.[11] Via Shinozaki's efforts, the Association managed to obtain the blessing of senior figures in the Japanese military and the feared *kempeitai*.[12] Using his high-level connections (as well as his semi-celebrity status as a former prisoner of the British), Shinozaki issued tens of thousands of "protection cards" to whoever came to him during the early weeks of the occupation.[13]

His duties as welfare officer continued such efforts. They were multifaceted, reflecting the chaos and confusion brought about by war, and to some extent mirroring what was to follow after 1945. Besides providing assistance in the form of money or advice, Shinozaki's welfare department also aided in the tracing of missing persons (and obtaining the release of some), helped people search for work, and also oversaw the "churches, boys' home, girls' home, convents".[14] Just as he was instrumental in the creation of the Overseas Chinese Association, Shinozaki was also involved in the establishment of the Syonan Eurasian Welfare Association and similar organizations for the Malay and Indian

[8] Shinozaki, *Wartime Experiences*, p. 59.
[9] For his role, Shinozaki was incarcerated in Changi Prison until invading Japanese forces released him. In reading his oral history, we have to take into consideration that interviewee might have been attempting to rationalize his past actions for his contemporaries and future audiences.
[10] Shinozaki, *Wartime Experiences*. His oral history formed the basis of his published memoir, *Syonan, My Story: The Japanese Occupation of Singapore* (Singapore: Asia Pacific Press, 1975).
[11] Shinozaki, *Wartime Experiences*, p. 29.
[12] The attitude shifted with a change in leadership in March 1942. New military administrators were less sympathetic and more demanding. One in particular, a Colonel Watanabe Wataru, demanded a donation of fifty million dollars from the Chinese community. Shinozaki also indicated that the "donation" drive might have been a follow-up in the search for anti-Japanese elements. From Shinozaki's point of view, the original intent of the OCA was tainted by association in its role in soliciting donations. Shinozaki, *Wartime Experiences*, p. 26.
[13] Shinozaki, *Wartime Experiences*, pp. 19-21.
[14] Shinozaki, *Wartime Experiences*, p. 53. The homes referred to most likely were institutions formerly run by the Salvation Army and religious bodies.

communities.[15] The general purpose for such organizations was to provide the individual communities, particularly the Chinese and Eurasians, with care and shelter in the form of an umbrella organization. He added that "any matter that did not come under the other departments would come under the Welfare Department".[16]

Shinozaki's approach was part of a broader policy to encourage communities to take care of their own, sometimes with a bit of government assistance. The Federation of Christian Churches for instance received monthly grants from the Japanese administration starting November 1942 to disburse to its collected flock.[17] Social welfare was not intended to be the exclusive purview of Shinozaki or the Japanese military administration. In 1943, a group of five Chinese *siang tng* (loosely translated as worshipper halls) came together to form the Blue Cross.[18] Yap Pheng Geck, a banker in prewar Singapore, was present at a *siang tng* session where the medium (in a trance) called for action to help relieve the distress caused by war and occupation.[19] A Teochew named Lim Soo Siam was also surprised by the medium's urging, as he himself had been urged by Shinozaki to organize some form of relief efforts for the people of Singapore.[20] The result was the Blue Cross, an organization that pledged to "serve the community in works of mercy and the relief of distress", primarily by pooling the resources of the five *siang tng*.[21]

The Blue Cross' scope of welfare services was broad. It began with the collection of dead bodies from streets and their burial. Yap recalled that "quite a number of *towkays* (businessmen)" raised funds to acquire carts, labor and materials to construct makeshift coffins. The Blue Cross collected "seven to ten" bodies every day during its early days.[22] The organization soon expanded its activities to include free food for "the needy and derelicts" via

[15] See the oral history of Paglar's son in NAS OHC, Eric Charles Pemberton Paglar. Japanese Occupation of Singapore. Accession Number 000299. Interviewed in 1983. Reels 3 and 4 (of 18), and relevant sections in Shinozaki's memoir and oral interview.
[16] Shinozaki, *Wartime Experiences*, p. 60. See also Lee, "Singapore under the Japanese", chapter V.
[17] Earnest Lau, *From Mission to Church: The Evolution of the Methodist Church in Singapore and Malaysia, 1885-1976* (Singapore: Genesis Books, c2008), pp. 161-164. See also *Many Faces One Faith* (Singapore: National Council of Churches of Singapore, 2004).
[18] The five groups were the Siew Teck, Nam Ann, Phoh Kiu, Thong Hong and Thong Teck. *Siang tng* literally translates to "Center of Charity". Information on Blue Cross derived from Yap Pheng Geck, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier: The Reminiscences of Dr. Yap Pheng Geck; issued under the auspices of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies* (Singapore, Singapore: Times Books International, 1982).
[19] Yap, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 86.
[20] Yap, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 86.
[21] Yap, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 86.
[22] Yap, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 87-88. An adjunct organization called the Black Cross started soon after to take care of funeral and burial arrangements. In contrast to the Blue Cross, the Black Cross represented mostly the working class and was led by Chua Ho Ann.

mobile kitchens and feeding centers within the city.[23] The Blue Cross also acted as a liaison, as a coordinating agent between different sections of the public so as to facilitate social services. One example was the provision of basic medical care via some "sixty or seventy Chinese *sinsehs*" (medicine men), which worked mainly as an extension of "peace-time services [provided by] charitable institutions like the Thong Chai Medical Centre ... and the Kwong Wai Shiu Free Hospital...."[24] As the war drew to a close and Singapore was once again subjected to aerial bombing – this time by Allied aircraft – the Blue Cross also helped in organizing fire-fighting teams, emergency feeding and relief, and temporary accommodations. Yap recalled that donations and support for the Blue Cross came primarily from the public at large. Except for official recognition by the authorities and the freedom to conduct its activities, the Blue Cross was careful to avoid subsidies or other forms of support from the Japanese.[25]

Just as the Second World War was a catalyst for change in British colonial and metropolitan social policy, wartime conditions in Singapore similarly encouraged, necessitated even, a more consolidated approach to social issues. Yap suggested that the Blue Cross initiative was the "first time" a collective effort was made to "relieve distress", in contrast to the comparatively isolated prewar charitable institutions. Another "first" was Shinozaki's role as Chief Welfare Officer. That was the first time a government of Singapore – albeit the Japanese version during wartime – assigned an official position for social welfare. Shinozaki's personal interpretation of social welfare work as "any matter that did not come under the other departments would come under the Welfare Department", is also strikingly similar to Lucy Mair's presentation of social welfare work in the British Empire as "those aspects of social welfare which are not the special interest or concern of other Departments".

Life during the Japanese Occupation

The above provides the broad contexts and considerations of war and occupation, which undoubtedly had affected the lives of many individuals. Still, an individual's decisions and actions might not always have conformed to expectations or the anticipated narratives of

[23] Yap, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 88. See also oral histories in NAS OHC of by Chia Kee Huat (Japanese Occupation of Singapore, Accession No: 000358, Reels 6 and 8); Lam Joo Chong (Chinese Dialect Groups, Accession No: 000989, Reel 17 of 26); and Tey Yan Hoon (Japanese Occupation of Singapore, Accession No: 000281, Reel 16).
[24] Yap, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 89.
[25] Yap, *Scholar, Banker, Gentleman Soldier*, p. 89.

broader histories. Last seen in Chapter 2, Augustin Gomez, Valentine Frois, and Wong were dealing with the fallout of the Great Depression. Gomez had been repatriated back to India in 1932, but managed to return to Malaya in 1934, resuming work in a plantation estate in Pahang. Supported by family, Frois made a quicker recovery, finding employment as a wharf clerk for a shipping agency in Singapore. After several years of moving in search of work, Wong managed to secure a job working in the British naval base in Singapore.

Gomez' experiences during the occupation period were relatively uneventful. Similar to how local Malays were elevated to higher positions of responsibility in the absence of the British, the internment of the European estate manager meant Gomez ran the entire rubber estate. By 1943, he had saved enough from working on the estate as well as dabbling in the black market to strike out on his own. He opened a dispensary in Kuala Lumpur, notwithstanding his dubious credentials in administering and distributing medicines. When that fell through, he worked as a supervisor of a "Japanese-run cultivation project" on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur where he remained until the British returned in September 1945.[26] Frois, on the other hand, did experience firsthand some of the violence the Japanese invasion brought to Singapore. He volunteered in an Air Raid Precaution squad to help deal with fires caused by incendiary bombs in the city area. He recalled widespread confusion, panicked evacuations, and looting in the city. He eventually took refuge in the countryside just before Singapore surrendered to the Japanese. After a while, he applied to the now Japanese-controlled Harbour Board office for a job. What he did was not clear, but after a year, he was made a *kepala* (a headman) in charge of a crew of ten men operating and maintaining a "light generating plant" on a small island off Singapore.[27] He worked in this capacity for the duration of the occupation, and appeared relatively secured of in terms of wages and food. Even though he had fallen ill with beriberi, incapacitating him for a time from work, his Japanese boss still retained his services. Valentine remained on the small island until the British returned.

Frois' experiences as a Eurasian were perhaps the exception rather than the norm. The Japanese had perceived Eurasians as staunch allies of the British. They spoke English, and many served in the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force.[28] Other communities, in particular

[26] Coelho, "Old Man on Public Assistance".
[27] Coelho, "Old Man on Public Assistance", pp. 75-76. The island was identified as Pulau Damar Laut, off Jurong in the west of the island
[28] Frois' Portuguese rather than English or British heritage could have been the differentiating factor. See Lee, *The Syonan Years*, pp. 117-118.

the Chinese, also suffered. The harsh treatment meted out to the Chinese community by the Japanese has been well-documented, the prime example being the *sook ching* (or *dai kensho)* campaign that resulted in thousands dead or missing.[29] The *sook ching* campaign had occurred early in the occupation period, but the brutality and trauma of the event, along with other incidents, such as the infamous "donation" of fifty million dollars, framed Chinese perceptions of the Japanese and Japan for years to come.

Still, when the need to survive was urgent, one took any opportunity that came one's way. Wong lost his job at the naval base as a result of the surrender. He initially kept a safe distance from the Japanese, until he needed a job.[30] During the early weeks of the occupation, Wong resorted again to hawking, this time selling sundries and foodstuffs, such as vegetables, salted fish, onions and sundry goods. He also worked for a while with his brother-in-law who had a permit to sell rice and flour. The need to protect himself however soon forced Wong to ride a trishaw ferrying passengers. Wong had registered with the Japanese military administration as a trishaw rider to avoid being press-ganged into overseas labor parties, but eventually had to buy an actual trishaw and ride it because of new regulations. Conditions soon settled down sufficiently to allow Wong to work as a carpenter helping to build a "Japanese military unit" at Farrer Park.[31]

Tan Beng Neo's wartime experiences are also informative. The Salvation Army officer recalled being in tears when she heard of Singapore's surrender. The immediate concern then was to ensure the Army's girls' home at Oxley Road had sufficient food supplies, and more importantly, remained safe from Japanese harassment. This was managed to some extent by hoarding money, stockpiling as much food as they could find, and obtaining an official Japanese document declaring the Oxley Road premises cleared safe by the military. The home continued at Oxley Road for another year and a half after the surrender, until Shinozaki moved them all to the premises of the Po Leung Kuk at York Hill.[32] Beng Neo recalled that by that time, nuns from the Order of the Good Shepherd were managing the home, though ensuring that the rescued prostitutes were separated from the

[29] Lee, *The Syonan Years*, p. 105.
[30] Chia, "The Place of the Hawker".
[31] Chia, "The Place of the Hawker", pp. 6-7.
[32] Beng Neo's personal recollections of Shinozaki's efforts to cultivate trust, or at least a working relationship between the Japanese and local communities via social services, are interesting. She remembered picnic trips to the Japanese shrine in MacRitchie Reservoir, and once even to the Sultan's palace in Johor. Shinozaki gave lectures on Japanese culture, and also once on the rationale for their presence in Singapore. Beng Neo went along but did not pay much attention. She was unhappy about having to be in close contact with the Japanese, but like others with her, felt she had no choice.

nuns' own charges. The Catholic nuns and their wards were eventually moved out of York Hill to Bahau, as part of Shinozaki's resettlement program for Catholics and Eurasians.[33] The remaining children and staff were cared for by a Japanese family. Beng Neo had no further contact with the Salvation Army after they were moved to the Po Leung Kuk. The Salvation Army was, for all sense and purposes, defunct. The Salvation Army's Caucasian officers were all rounded up and interned in Changi or in Sime Road camp. Beng Neo herself moved around in search of food and work. Her recollections of the Japanese Occupation have a recurring theme of a constant search for food. After a few months at the Po Leung Kuk, she moved to Malacca ostensibly to work on farmable land. When that fell through, she returned to Singapore to work as a nurse in the Japanese-ran Kandang Kerbau Hospital.[34]

Beng Neo, Wong, Frois, and Gomez were four individuals among thousands of others affected by economic slumps, war, occupation and then re-occupation by the British. Their individual life histories do not immediately fit conventional narratives of the Japanese Occupation of general suffering and deprivation, nor with the supposedly triumphant and welcomed return of the victorious British. The latter event was just as disruptive for some. Wong lost his wartime carpentry job and reverted to hawking to eke out a living. But unlike earlier where hawking was temporary, it was permanent this time as he could not return to work at the re-established British naval base.[35] Beng Neo on the other hand reconnected with her fellow Salvation Army officers, rejoining them in time for the Salvation Army's part in postwar recovery.

Welfare during the British Military Administration

The second atomic bomb, dropped on Nagasaki, and the Soviet Union's declaration of war finally forced Japan to surrender on 15 August 1945. On the same day Emperor Hirohito made his radio broadcast publicly announcing Japan's intent to surrender, the British issued a

[33] As food shortages in Singapore worsened, Shinozaki was put in charge of a resettlement program in Johor. This was executed primarily through his welfare organizations, the Overseas Chinese Association and the Eurasian Welfare Association. By 1944, some 12,000 Chinese settled in Endau, while about 3,000 Eurasians (mostly Catholics) settled in Bahau. The Bahau settlement was less successful, claiming over a thousand lives. For a recent publication on the Bahau settlement, see Fiona Hodgkins, *From Syonan to Fuji-Go: The Story of the Catholic Settlement in Bahau in WWII Malaya* (Singapore: Select Publishing, 2014).
[34] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reels 10-15.
[35] At least up to the point of the sociological study by Chia Cheong Fook in 1954. Wong blamed the loss of his work pass for not being able to return to the naval base to work after the British return. Only former employees producing the pass were accepted.

proclamation establishing the British Military Administration in Malaya and Singapore.[36] In doing so, British presence was officially reinstated after an absence of more than forty months. It was however a presence established only on paper as the British did not manage to return to Malaya and Singapore for another three weeks. The British had been amassing an invasion force, but they were caught out by the quick end to the war. As a result, they could not return as (re-)conquering heroes and reclaim any martial pride or moral authority lost in their ignominious defeat three and a half years before.[37] Moreover, in the vacuum that ensued after the Japanese laid down their arms, elements of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army emerged from the jungles and moved into the urban areas before the British could return. They asserted a new-found (oft-times violent) authority which portended difficult days ahead for the British in Malaya and Singapore.[38]

Advanced British units reached Penang on 2 September, Singapore on 5 September, and the Malay Peninsula proper on 9 September. The British Military Administration was officially established on 12 September after Lord Louis Mountbatten officially received the Japanese surrender in Southeast Asia. The British Military Administration was headed by the chief planner of the Malayan Planning Unit, Major-General Ralph Hone, who took on the designation Chief Civil Affairs Officer. Administrative functions were further divided into two divisions, one for Singapore and another for Malaya, each led by a Deputy Chief Civil Affairs Officer.

The Social Cost of War and Occupation

Singapore was spared much of the physical destruction and violence of a military re-conquest when the Japanese surrendered in August 1945. Nevertheless, there was still much to do in terms of reconstruction and rehabilitation. Essential services such as water, gas and electricity were not completely neglected by the Japanese, but had been limited throughout the occupation. Port facilities, railways and roads had to be repaired to transport critical supplies, such as food and medicines. Even then, there were simply not enough vehicles.[39]

[36] The Japanese signed the instrument of surrender on 2 September on board the USS Missouri. A copy of the proclamation can be found in NUSCL, CO 273/675/50822/56/3. "Military Administration re-occupation of Malaya fortnightly reports".
[37] As noted by Bayly and Harper in *Forgotten Wars*, p. 12.
[38] See Cheah Boon Kheng's *Red Star over Malaya*. The ensuing violence between the Malay and Chinese communities served as an indirect prelude to the armed Communist insurgency that began in 1948.
[39] Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, p. 229; See also Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 40-41, and for a firsthand account, Oswald Wellington Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore* (London: Benn, 1950)

Oswald Wellington Gilmour, a member of the Malayan Planning Unit, was one of the first to set foot in Singapore on 5 September. A former employee of the Singapore Municipal Commissioners before the war, his immediate task was to take over from the Japanese offices and buildings so as to start up operations of "essential services" again, such as running water, electricity, etc. In a memoir, he recalled that "[o]n September 5th, [Singapore town] had, to all appearance been dead and virtually deserted".[40] Gilmour was first met by "two Indians and a Chinese boy" near the harbor wharf, who were apparently so dazed they could only respond with a "stupefied stare" to his greeting.[41] But over the next couple of weeks:

> Gradually, the little shops opened…. Similarly, the street hawkers reappeared, each with his own peculiar noise-making instrument, a new noise each day indicating the revival of another hawking trade. The crowds in the streets got bigger and bigger and Singapore's only remaining transport, the rickshaws and tri-shaws, multiplied exceedingly.[42]

Gilmour recalled the immediate problems the British Military Administration confronted in the following weeks and months. There was not enough food, especially rice, for everyone in postwar Singapore. He wrote that people were "deplorably thin and hungry", suffering from beriberi and other forms of malnutrition. Supplies of medicines and clothing were also insufficient, compounded by the shortages in transportation. The black market flourished and crime was rampant. The drastic measure of discontinuing Japanese currency as legal tender, while necessary, took its toll as many became paupers overnight. Postwar Singapore also became a transit point for the thousands of refugees and displaced persons from Malaya and Southeast Asia. The Javanese in particular formed a substantial number, having been press-ganged into labor parties and then cast aside, waiting to be "picked up from the streets in a wretched or dying condition".[43] What goodwill liberation brought dissipated as dissatisfaction with the British increased.

The above is extracted from Gilmour's memoir, a recollection from a government official's point of view of the key problems that vexed postwar Singapore. For contrast, the following observations come from a member of the Anglican Church who arrived in Singapore in early October 1945. Writing in June 1946, David Rosenthal, Bishop's Commissary and Chaplain to St. Andrew's Cathedral, identified three "grave injuries" done to

[40] Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, p. 103.
[41] Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, p. 89.
[42] Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, p. 103.
[43] Gilmour, *With Freedom to Singapore*, pp. 139-140. Yap also mentioned scores of "Indonesian" men in the streets in his memoir.

the people of Singapore by the Japanese occupation. They were interrupted education, disruption to family life, and the "demoralisation of young people".

> Interrupted education: There are large numbers of young men and women who were at school in 1942 and who should now be wage-earners or well on their way to a professional career. Instead, they are either back at school again, or working through pressure of family need at unskilled or semi-skilled jobs, without future and without scope for their undeveloped talents. This excising of three and a half most valuable years from the lives of many promising future citizens will have a serious effect on the growing democracy of Singapore and Malaya.
>
> Disruption to family life: [T]he saddest part … is the number of fatherless children and widows. There is still no accurate count of the men who were either slaughtered in Singapore or taken away for forced labour to an exile from which they will never return.
>
> Demoralization of youths: have spent their formative years in an atmosphere of suspicion, brutality, fear and gross and unashamed bestiality. They cannot help being infected with the feeling that these things are commonplace. They have to a large extent lost their instinctive disgust and horror of what the civilised world calls evil. Their reeducation is by no means hopeless but it is going to be difficult.[44]

Notwithstanding a fair bit of embellishment in the those observations, they do focus our attention more on the social cost of war and occupation. Rosenthal's observations do not fundamentally contradict Gilmour's memories. But they add detail and depth, hence give a sense of urgency compared to the more detached listing of problems. For instance, Rosenthal narrated an example of a surgeon friend who hesitated to perform emergency surgery, because the absence of adequate nutrition enfeebled patients so much that the risks of an operation "outweighed the chances of the patient's recovery without it".[45]

The human condition was probably at its lowest point, suffering as most did from malnutrition and physical and mental hardships during the occupation. There was a multitude of problems confronting the military government, but most of them could be attributed to the general shortage of food and medical supplies, and the lack of ways and means of support. As a nurse during the Japanese Occupation, Beng Neo went on rounds giving vitamin B doses (either via an intravenous drip or through intramuscular injections) for three hundred Japanese dollars per dose. She did not expand on this activity much, but it is likely this was

[44] *The Malaya Tribune*, 1 June 1946, "The Malayan Welfare Council".
[45] *The Malaya Tribune*, 1 June 1946, "The Malayan Welfare Council".

done on the side to supplement her income. Beng Neo recalled the condition of a woman she encountered:

> Well, this woman was eating tapioca skin. I was horrified. She had no rice, no money to buy even tapioca. So she went to the dustbins and picked up the skin, washed the skin… you know the dark of the skin, scraped it off and cooked the rest for food.… She was staying in Amoy Street.… It was a slum…. We climbed up the steps. The steps were filthy. But she kept her room fairly clean. And there were some planks and things along one side of the wall where everybody would sleep. And I think the boys slept on the floor at night. There were lots of pillows and blankets and things like that, all piled up. She had only that one room. Everyone [a household of eight persons] was in that room.[46]

One British Military Administration file, entitled "Application for Relief", contained numerous letters seeking assistance for a range of problems. These included concerned citizens seeking assistance for those they had encountered in the streets. Bujang bin Awang for instance requested help for an old Malay beggar woman who was reduced to sleeping on the five-foot ways (the pedestrian walkways of shop-houses between the shop and the road) near Sultan Mosque. (She had lost her sons in the war).[47] Wives of servicemen wrote in requesting assistance to locate their husbands lost in the fighting (and some financial assistance to help tide them over).[48] There were Europeans seeking assistance and even redress for war damages. An employee with *The Straits Times* appealed directly to Ralph Hone and unashamedly asked for $5,000 to cover his immediate living expenses and an additional $30,000 to replace lost cash (even though he had been reemployed at the re-launched broadsheet).[49] Locals, who were ex-servicemen or had worked for the British military services before the war, also wrote in seeking work, back-pay and compensation for hardships suffered during the occupation, or for immediate relief from dire circumstances.[50] Notwithstanding the end of hostilities, there was an instance where a Chinese woman was refused food rations despite her own exemplary behavior, due to the fact that her Dutch husband had aided the Japanese during the occupation.[51]

[46] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 15.
[47] NAS, BMA HQSD 139/45. Bujang Awang to DCCAO BMA Singapore, 8 November 1945.
[48] NAS, BMA HQSD 139/45. Various.
[49] NAS, BMA HQSD 139/45. Richard Sidney to Ralph Hone, 30 September 1945
[50] NAS, BMA HQSD 139/45. Various.
[51] NAS, BMA HQSD 139/45. 6 December 1945.

Plans were in motion to address some of the (more reasonable) requests above, and overall social needs. One day after Mountbatten received the Japanese surrender, Ralph Hone convened a meeting on 13 September 1945 to discuss the "coordination and problems regarding the welfare and health of the peoples in Malaya".[52] It included representatives from various charitable institutions and welfare organizations in Singapore, including the Salvation Army, the various Christian churches and the Blue Cross, government officials, and Lady Louis Mountbatten as the representative of the Joint War Organization of the British Red Cross and St. John Ambulance Brigade.

During the meeting, the Bishop of Singapore (Reverend John Leonard Wilson) estimated that there were 10,000 to 50,000 persons who needed money and food immediately.[53] Two Chinese ministers from the Chinese Methodist Church reiterated that the British decision to discontinue the Japanese legal tender (commonly known as the banana note) was a severe inconvenience to the population.[54] Leong Siew Tai, a member of the Red Swastika Society, said that about 4,000 people were being attended to every day at six medical centers established by the Society.[55] He also added that the Japanese currency he possessed was useless in supporting the Society's activities. Hans Schweizer, the delegate of the International Red Cross for Malaya, mentioned that there were tens of thousands of Chinese who were destitute and in concentration camps.[56] Representing the Blue Cross, Yap Pheng Geck noted that the health situation needed immediate attention. He also listed the following "priority needs":

(a) Opening of free hospitals.
(b) A free hospital solely for consumptives.
(c) Inoculation of the people against outbreaks of diseases which would be inevitable at this time (cholera, typhoid, etc.)

[52] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. Meeting minutes, 13 September 1945. Reported in *The Straits Times*, 15 September 1945, "70 Trained Women Welfare Workers".
[53] He arrived in Singapore from Hong Kong in July 1941 and was Bishop until 1948. An introductory biography of Bishop Wilson (1870 to 1970) can be found here: http://www.far-eastern-heroes.org.uk/keeping_the_faith/.
[54] Rev. Goh Hood Keng shared with the meeting that a "large sum of Japanese currency" donated for relief purposes was now useless. His compatriot, Rev. Chew Hock Him, stressed the urgent need for currency. NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. Minutes of meeting dated 13 September 1945.
[55] For more information on the Red Swastika Society, see memo in BMA HQSD 64/45, dated September 1945.
[56] Schweizer was the Delegate for the International Committee of the Red Cross to Malaya and Singapore.During the *sook ching*, Chinese were "concentrated" at various locations in the island for screening purposes, most times for several days at a stretch. It is not clear if these "camps" continued after the *sook ching* process. See Lee, *The Syonan Years*. Also mentioned by Shinozaki who called them "concentration centres", in *Wartime Experiences*, pp. 25-26.

(d) Re-organisation of leper hospitals. Lepers had been allowed to go about in the streets, mixing with the population and spreading this disease. The hospitals should be extended and properly organized so that the victims would be encouraged to stay there. The same applied to mental homes.
(e) Roadside Destitutes – Javanese coolies. These should be collected and properly organized.
(f) Travelling Dispensaries should be formed to help those who need medical aid and are unable to reach a centre.
(g) The services of all the charitable institutions in Singapore should be used.[57]

The conference served as the prelude to the "Social Welfare Advisory Committee", whose formation was anticipated in the social welfare policy (discussed in Chapter 2). The directive had envisioned a collaborative effort between government and charitable and voluntary organizations, with the latter taking the lead in identifying and addressing social problems. On the surface, it would appear that the drafters of the policy directive anticipated correctly the need for collaboration. The observations made by Yap, Schweizer, Bishop Wilson and others, provide an overview of the social conditions and immediate needs in the wake of the Japanese Occupation. The individuals and institutions called to the meeting represented Singapore (and Malayan) society at that time. In addition to wartime welfare organizations like the Blue Cross, representatives from the Anglican and Methodist Churches, the Salvation Army, Indian and Muslim communities were also present.

Interestingly, welfare organizations connected to the Japanese military government were excluded, such as the Overseas Chinese Association or the Eurasian Welfare Association. Representing the communities most under threat during the occupation, these associations had worked closely with the Japanese, particularly in the resettlement projects in Endau and Bahau in Johor.[58] After the war, the British attempted to convict the president of the Eurasian Welfare Association, Dr. Charles Paglar (born to a British father and Indian mother), for treason.[59] There was perhaps a slightly vengeful atmosphere introduced by the returning British during the immediate postwar period. This was evident during the 13 September conference, where Yap apparently felt sufficiently self-conscious to state on record

[57] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. Meeting minutes, 13 September 1945.
[58] See Lee, *The Syonan Years*.
[59] The trial was eventually adjourned without a verdict after an emotionally charged testimony by Shinozaki defending the actions of Paglar and other community leaders implicated by the British for treason. Paglar was only acquitted of the treason charge much later. See Denyse Tessensohn, "The British Military Administration's Treason Trial of Dr. Charles Joseph Pemberton Paglar, 1946". (Unpublished MA Thesis, NUS Department of History, 2007). Dr. Lim Boon Keng was never persecuted for his role as President of the Overseas Chinese Association.

that his wartime welfare activities "naturally" puts him under suspicion.[60] Such instances provide an interesting contrast between social welfare, as understood in general terms, and the politics of welfare. An ideally uncomplicated, arguably universal, process of providing care and comfort to the needy was unavoidably complicated by perceptions of choices made during wartime.

Politics was obvious during the 13 September meeting. A sign of things to come, conference members could not agree on an appropriate person to preside over the council. Hone initially suggested a member of his staff be appointed to lead the council. In response, Herbert Lord from the Salvation Army preferred a non-government figure instead, and suggested the Bishop of Singapore as an alternative. Highlighting that welfare work would "concern medical and health problems" (and perhaps not wishing social welfare to be too closely connected to religion), a Dr. Hopkins (listed as "Govt. Medical Officer, Singapore") suggested the former Director of Civil Medical Services of the Straits Settlements take the position. The recorded minutes stated rather blandly that after "further discussion, it was decided" that Hone be appointed as President for "time being".[61] In doing so, the policy directive was followed to the letter. But the small disagreement was indicative of conflicts to come between government and voluntary societies and charitable organizations.

The following day on 14 September, the Malayan Welfare Council met for the first time. Compared to the gathering the day before, the meeting now included the Young Men Christian Association, Young Women Christian Association, the Buddhist Association, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, representatives from privately-run hospitals and homes as well as the Indian community.[62] The main agenda for the meeting was to draft and approve a charter for the Council's activities. The charter made it clear it was not an executive body. Instead, the Council was to advise the British Military Administration on all matters concerning social welfare. The Council could and was empowered by the charter to

[60] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. 13 September 1945. Yap was in the presence of those who had been interned and tortured. For example, Bishop Wilson, the head of the Anglican Church, had been detained and tortured by the Kempeitai during the Double Tenth incident in 1943.
[61] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. 13 September 1945.
[62] The full list is as follows (spelling as in document): Salvation Army & Children's Aid Society (represented by Commissioner H. A. Lord); Chinese Chamber of Commerce (represented by Richard Lim), "Kho Su Lim" (Buddhist Association) (Koh Toon Hor), Tong Shui Hospital (Ng Seng Peng), Kwong Wai Siu Free Hospital (Hong Peng Shing), World Red Swastika Society (Leon Siew Tai and Loh Seng Tak), Indian Relief (Dr J. T. P. Handy), YMCA (Rev. John Handy and Rosalind Foo), Municipal Infant Welfare Dept., Convents & The Sisters of the Poor (Dr. Mary Tan), Blue Cross Workers (Chinese Charitable Institutions Union) (Yap Pheng Geck), International Red Cross (Hans Schweizer), YWCA (Jean Begg and Nancy Russell), Red Cross (Enid Fernandes), The Home for the Destitute (Chinese) (Shao Ching Yuan), Red Cross Co-ordination (Commissioner McConchie). See NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45.

"formulate and inaugurate" new welfare schemes as it saw fit. But the postwar situation and the lack of resources meant that the Council and its executive committees relied heavily on the British Military Administration. This was despite the latter's position of not taking on long-term the burden of social welfare on its own. Indeed, it was recorded in the charter that voluntary effort should be "fostered and encouraged" so as to eventually relax "Government control and financial assistance".[63] In the meantime however, it was recognized that Government, in the form of the British Military Administration, would have to take the lead. Postwar society in general was in no shape to respond substantially to appeals for assistance or donations. At the behest of the Council, Hone made a direct appeal to the War and Colonial Offices in London for start-up funds to establish a Malayan Relief and Welfare Fund, and to also help contact Malayan Associations around the world for donations.[64]

The Malayan Welfare Council was short-lived. It met for a sum total of ten times in a period of eight months (between September 1945 and May 1946).[65] The Council functioned more effectively as the umbrella organization for Regional Executive Committees established throughout British Malaya. As the British reasserted control in Malaya, more regional committees were formed.[66] Those committees focused on relieving postwar distress, soliciting assistance (monetary or in kind) on a Pan-Malayan platform, and distributing received aid to identified needs. These included relief supplies (mostly food and clothing) from various Red Cross organizations and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, organizing a fund-raising event in early 1946, and the management of the Malayan Welfare and Relief Fund. Social issues with longer-term ramifications and their possible solutions were also discussed during meetings, laying the foundations for Singapore and Malaya's postwar social policy. The Council endorsed broad policy initiatives either from its regional committees or the British Military Administration, namely to address malnutrition, to introduce initiatives for youth development, and to restart the rehabilitation of child prostitutes. The Council provided money to establish Singapore's first youth clubs as well as a training school to house former child prostitutes. Victor Purcell, in his capacity as the

[63] NUSCL, CO 273/677/7 (50957). Malayan Welfare Council Charter.
[64] See correspondence in NUSCL, CO 273/677/8 (50957/1). The British Treasury gave a grant of £1,000 and the Colonial Office helped contact various Malayan Associations around the world. See also NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45, 3 Oct 1945 meeting.
[65] Minutes of MWC meetings can be found in BMA HQSD 64/45 (first meeting: 14 Sept; second: 3 Oct; third: 8 Oct), BMA HQSD 34/46 (eighth: 11 March 1946, and ninth: 29 March 1946), and Colonial Secretary Office (CSO) 1142/46 (tenth: 27 May 1946).
[66] No direct information. By the end of 1945, committees were formed for Penang and Kedah, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and Seremban, and Ipoh. NAS BMA HQSD 64/1945. Committees for the states of Selangor, Pahang, Perak, Kedah, Penang, Kelantan, and Johore were formed by January 1946. NAS, BMA HQSD 34/46.

administration's Adviser for Chinese Affairs, urged both the Council and the British Military Administration to provide the resources for a home to protect and rehabilitate child prostitutes.[67] The status of the Council was affected by the political separation of Singapore from the Malayan Union in April 1946. Singapore had been administered as part of the Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements until 1942. Although there was substantial lobbying for the Pan-Malayan approach to continue, the official standpoint that the Council should be split to better reflect the two different administrations held.[68] The Malayan Welfare Council officially ended on 27 May 1946 at its tenth meeting.

Implementing Social Welfare: The Singapore Executive

One week after the first meeting of the Malayan Welfare Council, the Regional Executive Committee for Singapore (hereafter Singapore Executive) met for the first time in the evening of 18 September 1945.[69] Very little is recorded of the Singapore Executive's activities. The organization's archival record is scattered and newspaper reports on its activities are scanty and at time confusing. The one public record of the Singapore Executive's activities is an article published in *The Malaya Tribune* on 1 June 1946. Its author, David Rosenthal, was the Singapore Executive's organizing secretary. In broadly sketching the postwar social problems and some of its remedies, Rosenthal noted most of the work was done through sub-committees for Medical, Relief, Education, and Youth.

Through those sub-committees, the Singapore Executive was responsible for starting a feeding scheme for infants and under-nourished schoolchildren, providing financial assistance, and also helped locals to continue or further their studies in British or overseas universities. For youths, Rosenthal also claimed the Singapore Executive made the initial proposals to establish a juvenile court and a supporting probationary system. To help with social rehabilitation, the Singapore Executive also started a couple of boys' clubs and made plans to assist young women and girls pressed into prostitution during the occupation

[67] As the BMA Adviser for Chinese Affairs, Victor Purcell noted the urgency of a home for the "protection and rehabilitation of child prostitutes" and that "girls of 10-25 [years of age] are suffering from venereal disease. NAS, BMA HQSD 34/46. Memo to CCAO, HQ BMA(S), Kuala Lumpur, 25 March 1946.

[68] NAS, BMA HQSD 34/46. Minutes of meeting dated 11 March 1946 and 29 March 1946. Decision to split was taken at latter meeting. The regional executive committees were divided over the question of a single or two welfare councils to replace the Malayan Welfare Council. Singapore Social Welfare Council inaugurated in July 1946, while the Malaya counterpart, the Central Welfare Council, was inaugurated in June 1946. Reported as "Malayan Central Welfare Council" in *The Straits Times*, 25 June 1946.

[69] Minutes of meetings can be found in BMA CH (Chinese Affairs) 27/45 (18 Sept and one undated), BMA HQSD 64/45 and BMA HQSD 34/46.

period.[70] The Singapore Executive was a microcosm of the Malayan Welfare Council. It was similarly constituted, which was a mix of government officials, representatives from voluntary and welfare organizations, and officials from prewar government departments (in particular those concerning public health).[71] The Singapore Executive was active throughout the military administration period and during the early months of the civil administration. The first and subsequent two meetings were originally chaired by the Bishop of Singapore. From October 1945, the Singapore Executive was chaired by Dr. William John Vickers until the committee's dissolution in 1946.[72]

Vickers was appointed by the British Military Administration and the specific choice of Patrick McKerron, the Deputy Chief Civil Affairs Officer for Singapore.[73] To be sure, a medical doctor was preferred to lead the Malayan Welfare Council as welfare work was generally associated with "medical and health problems".[74] The issues that dominated the Singapore Executive's first meeting reflected the rationale for the government's choice of chairman. There were thousands of refugees, displaced individuals, freed internees and prisoners of war (arriving from elsewhere in Southeast Asia and Asia), most if not all suffering from malnutrition and in urgent need of medical care. Hospital space, medicines and medical staff were at a premium. This raised real concerns about the unchecked spread of diseases and a consequent breakdown in social order.[75] The British Military Administration's primary objective – at least in the area of social welfare – was to ensure "that nobody within Singapore Island actually starved, and in getting destitutes off the streets into homes and hospitals where they could be fed and looked after".[76] Still, the decision to have a government official lead the Singapore Executive was made somewhat covertly.[77] It was never overtly stated the Council or its equivalent should be government-controlled, only that

[70] *The Malaya Tribune*, 1 June 1946, "The Malayan Welfare Council".
[71] List (as recorded): Col. R. Walkingshaw (CASM?); Dr Mary Tan (Municipal Health); John Eber; Col JW Scharf (HQBMA) Loh Seng Tak (Red Swastika); Richard Lim Chuan Hoe; Maj. BR Madden; Lt. Col. HA Lord (Salvation Army); Paul Samy; Rev. JTN Handy; Bishop Wilson; Rev. Olcamendy; Hans Schweizer; Enid Fernandes; Major J Pickering (BMA); Lt. Col. Matthews.
[72] Vickers was formerly with the Malayan Medical Service, serving in the Malay states from 1925 to the 1930s. He left Malaya before the Second World War, serving in Palestine and the West Indies overseeing development and welfare matters (in particular nutrition). He arrived in Singapore in October 1945 with the BMA and later became the Director for Medical Services in the civil administration from April 1946.
[73] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. File minutes. McKerron was formerly from the Malayan Civil Service. He was based in Trengganu in the 1920s as District Officer and acted as Resident in Brunei in the 1930s. Information taken from Awang Goneng, *Growing up in Trengganu* (Monsoon, 2007), p. 182.
[74] As stated during the preliminary meeting on 13 September. In NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45.
[75] NAS, BMA CH 27/45.
[76] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. Pickering (SO2 Refugees and Displaced Persons Branch) to DCCAO, 26 Sept 1945
[77] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. File minutes.

a "Social Welfare Officer" be appointed to coordinate welfare work between government and society. Leading members from non-government organizations, such as Lord from the Salvation Army, were also eager to have one of their own lead the Malayan Welfare Council. The failure to come to a consensus led to Hone, the highest authority in the British Military Administration, assuming the position of President instead. Vickers' appointment to the Singapore Executive reflected two issues: the welfare work urgently needed, and political expedience in managing the expectations of a mixed committee.

After the Singapore Executive's second meeting, a memo addressed to McKerron hinted at brewing tensions with the British Military Administration.[78] The memo noted "general criticism of the Government regarding the lack of action in concern with relief to families whose menfolk were killed or displaced during the Japanese regime, persons who are unemployable through ill health of old age...."[79] Inquiries were also made regarding compensation for property and items looted by the Japanese. Emotions were sufficiently charged for McKerron to personally attend the next meeting on 2 October. During the meeting, the government, represented by McKerron, was to address the claims of volunteers, members from irregular military units, and "passive defence" service personnel. It was observed that "the issue of an allowance to Resistance Army personnel" (from the Malayan Anti-Japanese People's Army) had caused "a lot of dissatisfaction". McKerron could only reassure the gathering that the matter was being handled. He also drew a distinction between his responsibility over civil affairs and military matters, and referred inquiries regarding relief for volunteers and their dependents to the military authorities.[80]

Although not raised again in subsequent Singapore Executive meetings, the matter of claims by non-military personnel dragged on beyond the committee and 1945. It became one of several postwar instances that gradually removed the shine of liberation and victory, widening the gap between British and non-British, between colonizer and the colonized.[81] Within a month of its establishment, the British Military Administration's authority was forcefully questioned, and not entirely without reason either. What appeared to be an

[78] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. Pickering (SO2 Refugees and Displaced Persons Branch) to DCCAO, 26 Sept 1945. Minutes of the second meeting of the Singapore Executive (dated 25 September 1945) cannot be found at time of writing to corroborate.
[79] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. Pickering (SO2 Refugees and Displaced Persons Branch) to DCCAO, 26 Sept 1945.
[80] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. Minutes of meeting 2 October.
[81] As gleaned by a brief scan of newspapers reporting on the issue. In 1946: *The Straits Times*, 21 May 1946, Page 4 "The Burning Question of Asiatic Back Pay"; *The Straits Times*, 21 July 1947, Page 4 "Another Disgusted Britisher On Burning Questions"; *The Singapore Free Press*, SEPT 20, 1947. "After Two Years".

uncomplicated issue of basic relief suddenly became political, going by McKerron's personal intervention in a Singapore Executive meeting. At that point in time, the Singapore Executive was chaired, albeit on temporary basis, by Bishop Wilson. The British Military Administration ensured his successor was a government official. That might have been coincidental and Dr. Vickers was genuinely thought to be the right person for the job. But it is also interesting how quickly a plea for compensation for services rendered during the defense of Singapore became a perceived challenge to the authority of the British.

Meeting Immediate Needs

Tensions and politics aside, the Singapore Executive did move quickly to address various social problems. Within days of its first meeting, a Citizen's Advice Bureau was set up at the Old Supreme Court, modeled after similar bureaus established in Britain at the beginning of the Second World War.[82] The Bureau's purpose was twofold. First to register and organize the inquiries of anxious families attempting to locate loved ones who had gone missing during the occupation period.[83] Second, to act as a point of contact between government and society so as to pass on advice and information as needed. It was managed first by Yap Pheng Geck, and was later absorbed into the government's Refugee and Displaced Persons Branch.[84] The Citizen's Advice Bureau was one of many initiatives conceptualized and implemented by the Singapore Executive. Sub-committees were eventually established, each reflecting the social issues that urgently needed attention. Following Refugees and Displaced Persons, sub-committees for Medical, Education, Relief, Youth and Finance soon followed.

The work of the Singapore Executive was an interesting mix of short- and long-term initiatives. The short-term objectives primarily involved keeping on top of medical and public health concerns. Shortages in medical supplies were further compounded by shortages in food, transportation and medical personnel. The British's drastic policy of doing away with the Japanese currency also severely affected capabilities to provide aid, such as the Blue Cross had to cut back on its operations for a shelter for destitutes.[85] The increasing numbers

[82] *The Straits Times*, 1 October 1945, "Tracing the Missing". The Citizen's Advice Bureau first appeared in Britain and can be traced to Betterton Report on Public Assistance in 1924. See http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/aboutus/factsheets/ourhistory.htm. Accessed 16 January 2015.
[83] The scale and implications of the *sook ching* massacres were not known in the immediate aftermath of war.
[84] See final report of BMA Refugee and Displaced Persons Branch in NAS, BMA 294/45.
[85] NAS, BMA CH 27/45. Singapore Executive first meeting – 18 September 1945

of refugees and others transiting Singapore was also not immediately met by a corresponding increase in space to accommodate them. In September 1945, it was estimated that there were roughly 1,200 hospital beds in total to cater to the entire civilian population.[86]

By October 1945, the Singapore Executive had identified food shortages as a key cause of malnutrition and other diseases.[87] The Relief Sub-Committee originally planned to open "soup kitchens" throughout the city to feed the hungry population, encouraged by the British Military Administration's promise of "abundant" food supplies. In its eagerness perhaps to begin welfare work, the position of government representatives during sub-committee meetings was apparently misrepresented. The British Military Administration felt the food scheme was "dangerous" as it was still uncertain about the level of food stocks. The official in question, a Major Wright, pleaded that he was "badly misquoted" in the minutes of the meeting.[88] Receiving the bad news, the Singapore Executive shelved the "soup kitchen" plan until such time that the "Government is ready to support it and make it a success".[89]

The Medical Sub-Committee, a mix of representatives from the British Military Administration and voluntary organizations, was only marginally more successful in establishing a free feeding scheme for infants and school-going children. In late November 1945, the Singapore Executive, in collaboration with the government's Medical and Education Departments, publicly announced a limited feeding program for children and infants attending three public schools and three municipal clinics.[90] From its inception to the end of British Military Administration on 31 March 1946, the scheme provided close to a quarter of a million free meals, feeding on average over 2,000 children each day.[91]

Clean statistics however hide a more complex tale of official reluctance and social pressures. Food and monetary grants, to the tune of $10,000 for the first month and thereafter $25,000 for each recurring month (matching equal amounts from private sources), were to be provided by the British Military Administration. But upon learning of the scheme's recurring costs, the administrators balked. It vetoed the continuation of the scheme beyond December 1945, giving reasons of inadequate supplies of rice, sugar and salt, and the "unwillingness to commit Civil Government" to such a scheme – unless the Colonial Office in London

[86] NAS, BMA CH 27/45. The beds were in the following hospitals: Tan Tock Seng, Kandang Kerbau, St. Andrew's and Middle Road. The General Hospital was primarily for transiting POWs and Internees.
[87] See for overview of health conditions in Malaya overall (including Singapore), Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya*, pp.319-324.
[88] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. File minute dated October 1945.
[89] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. Minutes of meetings on 6 and 13 November 1945.
[90] *The Straits Times*, 30 November 1945, "Scheme to Feed Singapore Children".
[91] *The Straits Times*, 31 July 1946, "Feeding Scheme to be enlarged".

concurred. That mainland Malaya would also wish for such a scheme and hence driving up recurring expenses was also a contributory factor.[92] The Singapore Executive – both official and non-government members – was outraged. The committee drafted, in the presence of its representatives, a strongly worded statement criticizing the actions of the British Military Administration:

> This Committee views with the greatest apprehension the statement of the B.M.A. that it is unable to provide either rice, sugar or salt for the emergency feeding scheme now in operation, and that approval of financial assistance would probably be so long delayed as to make continuance of this scheme impossible in any circumstances. With the greatest regret, therefore, this Committee is compelled to abandon the scheme already started.[93]

Privately, personal appeals were made to higher authority. Vickers followed up the Singapore Executive's statement with a semi-official memo addressed to McKerron. The former observed that "mal-nutrition in Singapore Island is a prime cause of much of the sickness and disease now prevalent...." He warned of an "inevitable rise in the sickness rate" should the scheme be discontinued along with the cuts in rice rations.[94] At the same time, a Colonial Office representative overseeing nutritional matters in Malaya, William M. Clyde, disputed the official reason for not wanting to burden succeeding civil government. He noted that quite to the contrary, the Colonial Office's policy was to encourage such schemes.[95] A parliamentarian from the British Labour Party also got involved. Having seen the scheme in operation firsthand in Singapore, Harold Davis petitioned the Secretary of State for War to intervene in a local matter, warning of a potential "medical and political disaster".[96] Commissioner Herbert Lord of the Salvation Army stated the value of the scheme was "incontestable". It would help deal with "chronic and wide-spread" malnutrition, and would also help reinforce public opinion in the context of falling rice rations. Lord noted the scheme's political value, observing that "members of the Leftist groups" were "greatly

[92] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. 10 December 1945. Controller of Finance and Accounts to DCCAO, BMA HQ Singapore Division.
[93] NAS, BMA HQSD 64/45. 11 December 1945.
[94] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. Vickers to McKerron, 13 December 1945.
[95] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. Clyde to McKerron, 27 December 1945.
[96] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. Undated cable telegram from Harold Davis to Secretary of State for War. Cable read: "Learn with dismay decision requiring BMA discontinue expenditure free meals school children from public funds. Troopers 130247 refers. Having personally seen present arrangements consider discontinuance medical and political disaster present circumstances. Understand decision contrary Colonial Office policy other colonies. Request immediate reconsideration in consultation Colonial Office enable present limited scheme at least continue".

impressed" with the scheme.[97] Public opinion was strongly in favor of the scheme. A *Straits Times* reporter also informed an official that "The people are saying, "We have had a lot of promises but here is the B.M.A. really doing something for us at last!"[98]

The response from the Singapore Executive caught the government's attention immediately. As 1945 drew to a close, the shine had definitely come off British liberation. Sections of the population felt their contributions during the war had gone unacknowledged. Already made penniless overnight by the drastic measure in discontinuing Japanese currency, the entire population was asked to expect further cuts in rice rations, which would eventually plunge to a point lower than during the Japanese occupation. Set up for wartime administration, the military government was not adequately prepared to govern in peacetime conditions and hence did not gain the long-term confidence of a suffering populace. The subsequent absence of an enemy to fight and a coherent mission led to idle troops and minds, helping the government earn its well-deserved nickname "Black Market Administration". The British Military Administration worked feverishly to prevent a public relations disaster on the matter of children's nutrition. On 29 December, BMA HQ in Malaya sought clarification from London, particularly the Colonial Office, on how to proceed. Again, it reiterated that the scheme could "be in practice impossible for civil governments" to continue in view of predicted large deficits in 1946.[99] McKerron also cabled London directly on 31 January. His cable is noteworthy for highlighting the "existing difficult situation here [Singapore] aggravated by strikes", and that "it would be politically most inopportune [to] discontinue present limited experimental scheme…."[100]

London finally replied on 18 February. The Colonial Office agreed that the scheme should continue, but emphasized that it was a "temporary measure", that "arrangements must however be kept under periodical review so that they can be terminated as soon as conditions return [to] normal".[101] The Colonial Office and the Treasury in London hoped that in "stressing temporary and emergency nature … it will be possible to avoid committing civil govts [sic] to continuing schemes indefinitely".[102] With that, the scheme plodded on into

[97] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. Undated memo summarizing brief history and developments of free feeding scheme by Herbert A. Lord.
[98] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. 23 January 1946. Memo on School Feeding by D Roper (Education Officer, BMA Singapore). Emphasis in source.
[99] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. 29 December 1945. HQ BMA (M) KL to "Troopers for CA" (Colonial Office / London)
[100] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. 31 January 1946
[101] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. 31 January 1946
[102] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. 31 January 1946

1946 and into the civil government era. It was sustained in part by strong medical opinion, official support from government officials such as Vickers and Clyde – who went on to work in the office of the Special Commissioner for South-East Asia on food matters, and a group of lady volunteers willing and able to ensure the scheme remained viable. (That part of the story is taken up in Chapter 5).

In retrospect, it is somewhat amazing that government cautiousness did not result in a public outcry. Even before the end of military administration, the British had already been forced into certain repressive measures. Sensing an anti-establishment connection to industrial unrest in late 1945, it censored and controlled the media, broke up labor strikes and detained their leaders.[103] By January, the British came to the conclusion that while economic and social conditions were the foundations of unrest, the disturbances were becoming more political in nature.[104] Warnings of potential political fallout were not unfounded. The strong statement by the Singapore Executive was not reported by any of the English-language newspapers. The efforts to keep the scheme running were only made public in July 1946, and only briefly alluded to.[105] Part of the reason could be that there was a strong official presence in both the main and sub-committees of the Singapore Executive, tempering potential anti-British or anti-colonial sentiments.

Long-term Plans: Youth

Far from being bogged down with urgent but temporary needs, the Singapore Executive kept its eyes firmly on the horizon, carrying out plans for a longer-term social policy. The committee was responsible for the establishment of the first youth clubs as well as the first juvenile court in Singapore (and Malaya). The idea for the former came as early as the first Singapore Executive meeting in September 1945. Bishop Wilson noted that in the wake of war and occupation, schools and other youth organizations, such as Scouts, Boys'

[103] For a historical overview, see Charles Gamba, *The Origins of Trade Unionism in Malaya: A Study in Colonial Labour Unrest* / with a foreword by Victor Purcell (Singapore: Published by Donald Moore for Eastern Universities Press, 1962). Tim Harper also covers the labor unrest and some of its implications in *The End of Empire*, pp. 80-81, 128-138.
[104] Victor Purcell noted that "the reasons for this strike [a general strike called in January 1946] are purely political. There is no question at all of wages or conditions of labour". Quoted in Daud Latiff, "The British Military Administration, September 1945 to April 1946", in Mohamed Amin and Malcolm Caldwell (eds.), *Malaya: The Making of a Neo-Colony* (Nottingham, UK: Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, 1977), p. 132.
[105] *The Singapore Free Press*, 17 July 1946, "Mr. Attlee Ordered Free Meals for S'pore".

Brigade etc., would take a while to get up and running.[106] Such conditions, it was feared, would lead to juvenile delinquency. A *Straits Times* article captured succinctly the situation:

> All organisations that normally provide outlets for boys of the ages of 12 to 18 were closed down. Abnormal economic conditions, as instanced in the black-market, resulted in resort to the quest for more means of securing food and disposing of property. Forced labour at a very young age, and association with older men of a type boys would not normally have met until they had arrived at a more balanced maturity, developed a precocity that must be recognised. Many youngsters have got completely out of hand. They have embarked upon black-market activity to obtain food and clothing for themselves and their needy families, to obtain money for entertainment and self-indulgence. The three and a half years of unrestricted evil tendencies contributed greatly to the growth of armed and gang robberies. There has been created a class of lad who has lost hope, who entertains no ambition with regard to the future, and accepts it as a fact that there is nothing worth trying for. Here then, is fertile ground for the political agitator.[107]

The brewing unrest from end 1945 to January 1946 was multifaceted in its causes and evolution. Genuinely poor postwar social and economic conditions were not only exacerbated by an ill-prepared military government, but also manipulated for political ends by a very organized Malayan Communist Party and its affiliate groups. Young boys and girls were the natural targets of the "political agitator", whether or not the youths themselves believed in propagated political aims. But having survived the war, youths emerged with more responsibility as most of them became the main breadwinners in the absence of parents or guardians. Fundamental basic needs (and their lack of) coupled with the natural instinct to survive could lead to alliances the British wished to prevent. McKerron publicly described the "youth problem" as the "biggest single social problem we have inherited from the Japanese occupation".[108] From early 1946, the government became more visibly interested in the youths of Singapore and Malaya. In February, it announced – rather prematurely – that a boys' club had been formed at Queens Street.[109] Shackled by various difficulties in acquiring the requisite resources, the Queens Street Boys' Club would not open until April – after the BMA period. Even then, public appeals were still being made for books, furniture and donations.[110] When started, the club aimed for a membership of a hundred boys, of ages between twelve and eighteen "who do not attend school". The club provided facilities for

[106] NAS, BMA CH 27/45. 18 September 1945.
[107] *The Straits Times*, March 13, 1946, "The Citizens of Tomorrow".
[108] *The Straits Times*, 14 April 1946, "Social Welfare Department for Singapore".
[109] *The Straits Times*, 26 February 1946, "Care of the Young".
[110] *The Straits Times*, 27 March 1946, "Boys' Club Opening in a Few Days".

sport, recreational activities, as well as vocational and educational training.[111] Before the official establishment of the Social Welfare Department in June 1946, two other clubs were opened or in the process of being opened in the Singapore Harbour Board and Katong areas.

The Singapore Executive's original plan was to establish youth clubs to occupy the time and attention of children who were waiting for schools to re-open. When the situation became more settled, community organizations such as the Young Men's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, the Rotary Club, and Toc H could then take over the running of the clubs.[112] However, the Singapore Executive did not make any meaningful progress in this area since Bishop Wilson first made the suggestion. Having firsthand experience, the Singapore Executive and its members could provide the moral argument. But in the immediate postwar period, the military administration was perhaps the only institution powerful enough to summon and provide the necessary resources, such as additional funds and physical spaces, to support the moral argument. Confronted with the specter of social unrest, government was not going to stand idly by.

In February 1946, the British Military Administration informed the public that a juvenile court was to be established as part of an overall plan to tackle the youth problem. This was not a new idea as the Salvation Army had earlier proposed something similar before the war. In 1940, Miss Sarah E. Nicoll-Jones was invited by the Straits Settlements government to investigate the problem of prostitution in Singapore.[113] A trained policewoman originally from Liverpool, Nicoll-Jones had worked extensively in Burma between 1926 and 1938 to eradicate the trafficking of women and children.[114] In a talk on tackling social evils delivered to the Singapore Rotary Club in 1941, she suggested that a juvenile court stood as a "symbol signifying that the State stands in loco parentis to its child, [as] a refuge to the harassed parent, it corrects, advises, and admonishes, and most of all it stands in the way of the exploiter". She went on to state that "A wisely-governed country does not want criminals to fill its courts. It has its young people's court to prevent the creation of criminals".[115] To

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[111] *The Straits Times*, 27 March 1946, "Boys' Club Opening in a Few Days". The club was chaired by a Richard Lim Chuan Hoe, a member of the Singapore Executive representing the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

[112] Toc H is an abbreviation for Talbot House, a soldier's rest and recreation site in Belgium during the Great War. For brief information, see http://www.toch-uk.org.uk/History.html.

[113] The report is available in the NUS Central Library: S. E. Nicholl-Jones, "Report on the problem of prostitution in Singapore", 1941. It was a report made to the Colonial Secretary, from the Office of the Inspector of Police, Singapore, Malaya.

[114] *The Straits Times*, 14 October 1940, "$6,283 for Study of Social Problem".

[115] *The Straits Times*, 6 March 1941, "Social Evil Problems"; *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (1884-1942), 6 March 1941, "How Expert Tackles Our Social Evil Problem".

attain such a goal, her final report to the Straits Settlements government recommended the establishment of a juvenile court and supporting institutions to reform young delinquents without prison incarceration, such as trade schools and a probation system.

The youthfulness of criminal offenses in the immediate postwar period caught the attention. For instance, in January 1946, three boys, ages fifteen and sixteen, were convicted in a police court for attempted armed robbery. The boys were found with a pistol and six rounds of ammunition, in possession moreover of a stolen trishaw. They were sentenced to two and a half years of imprisonment.[116] Behind the scenes, plans were afoot to tackle the "youth problem". In a memo dated 22 February 1946, most likely drafted in response to Singapore Executive proposals for youth development, government support was encouraged for private initiatives to set up clubs, camps and similar institutes.[117] The memo noted that "dubious political parties have already got ahead of us in this matter [the youth problem], but if we are prepared to spend enough money we can quickly make up the lost ground and attract young men away from organisations like the Youth New Democratic League which have no intention or desire to do their members any good".[118] The official also warned that the youth organizations "will undoubtedly be invaded by the Communists and their propaganda", and that even if kept out, they should expect "organised opposition from the outside ... [aimed] at discrediting the scheme".[119]

On 27 March 1946, the juvenile court convened its first sitting in Singapore. Mr. L. C. Goh acted as the Presiding Officer, with members of the Singapore Executive present as advisers, such as Herbert Lord from the Salvation Army and Yap Pheng Geck.[120] The Salvation Army also provided a temporary Probation Officer – a Captain Foo – to support the proceedings. The first sitting dealt with four cases, three of which were for cigarette offenses (selling above controlled prices), and one of an alleged theft of a military vehicle by a

[116] *The Straits Times*, 26 January 1946, "Jeep Patrol Bags 3 Armed Boys".
[117] NAS, BMA HQSD 34/46. Memo dated 22 February 1946. Singapore Executive proposals not located at point of writing.
[118] NAS, BMA HQSD 34/46. Memo dated 22 February 1946.
[119] NAS, BMA HQSD 34/46. Memo dated 22 February 1946.
[120] Original suggested "list of assessors to help the court" included: Col. Herbert A. Lord, Father Olcomendy, Rev. David Rosenthall [sic], Rev. Goh Hood Keng, Rev. Dr. D. D. Chelliah, Rev. Aiyathurai, Lt. Col. J. Wainwright, Capt. B. L. Chua, Messrs. Yap Pheng Geck, F. C. Sands, A. M. Alsagoff, Thio Chan Bee, Frank James, Ong Chen Lian, Mrs. H. A. Lord, Mrs. Lim Bock Kee, Mrs. J. R. Multiah, Mrs. Rosalind Foo, Miss Gertrude Own and Miss Isobel McIntyre. Medical advisers were also suggested: W. J. Vickers, D. W. C. Gawne, Dr. Chen Su Lan, Dr. Mary Tan, Dr. G. Haridas and Dr. R. C. Oehlers. The lists were drafted in early 1946 by a Wing Commander Briggs in Singapore, approved by McKerron and on 11 March 1946, put up to and endorsed by the Malayan Welfare Council. See NAS, BMA HQSD 34/46.

thirteen year old.[121] Within a month, Goh was dealing with an average of twenty cases every day, ranging from boys picked up from sleeping in five-foot ways and public spaces, to boys arrested for theft and other offenses.[122] As far as possible, offenders were placed under the care of their parents and the probation officer, though "in some cases poor parents are anxious to have their sons sent to a place where they would be taught some trade".[123] The only institution opened at that time was the Salvation Army Boys' Home, where boys stayed on average for three months and learned a vocation. "Sordid poverty and neglect" were the main themes of many of the boys' plight. It was also candidly noted that those "youths are not particular about the way they get their money", referencing their innovative if illegal methods in eking out a living.[124] Even when caught, wily youths attempted to bamboozle the system in a time before identity cards and accurate record-keeping. A Chua Beng Kiam was arrested for a theft of a purse in March 1946 and managed to drag his case out till July. He initially said he was fifteen, but when transferred to the juvenile court, he changed his age to nineteen. Chua changed his age for a third and fourth time before the judge finally took his age to be eighteen and sentenced him to fourteen weeks in prison.[125]

Tensions and Conflict

It is difficult to ascertain with any real accuracy the role and the effectiveness of the Singapore Executive and the Malayan Welfare Council in addressing the youth problem. David Rosenthal did, on behalf of the Singapore Executive, claim credit for the establishment of the juvenile court and the boys' clubs.[126] Records of the Singapore Executive however are scanty, and those available are incomplete. At best, the available evidence shows that other than Bishop Wilson's suggestion in the first meeting, the Singapore Executive focused more on urgent matters of food and nutrition for the remainder of 1945. Archival records used originated from and were filed by the British Military Administration, hence providing a particular perspective. Public sources such as newspapers also give the impression that it was the government that took the lead in addressing the youth issue. Tensions present in the child

[121] *The Straits Times*, 28 March 1946, "Juvenile Court Inaugurated".
[122] *The Straits Times*, 23 April 1946, "Singapore to Adopt Borstal System". The Borstal system refers to youth detention centers established in the early twentieth century (c.1902) to differentiate youth (generally speaking below the age of twenty-one) and adult offenders. It was named after a village located in England.
[123] *The Straits Times*, 23 April 1946, "Singapore to Adopt Borstal System".
[124] *The Straits Times*, 23 April 1946, "Singapore to Adopt Borstal System".
[125] *The Straits Times*, 4 July 1946, "A Little Difference of Ages".
[126] *The Straits Times*, 10 May 1946, "Too Many Children Prosecuted'; Also *The Malayan Tribune*, 1 June 1946.

feeding issue also appeared when addressing the youth problem. The relevant file minutes hinted at increasing friction between government officials, and between the British Military Administration and the Malayan Welfare Council and the Singapore Executive. An unidentified government official was extremely unhappy with views expressed by Victor Purcell in his capacity as Adviser for Chinese Affairs. The former also protested the tone of a request by the Malayan Welfare Council, suggesting that government should support its initiatives without interference. The response was scathing in its query whether "… the Malayan Welfare Council [was] going to do anything – or just pass the buck and take the credit?"[127]

The Singapore Executive had its last meeting on 4 June 1946, a little over two months into the civil government period. The committee's final months, at least from available meeting minutes, were uneventful. The child feeding scheme continued – albeit on a monthly basis. The Singapore Executive was looking to add a couple more clubs to the functioning Queens Street Boys' Club, and efforts continued in vain to establish a home for child prostitutes.[128] Between the Singapore Executive and the military and later civil government, the final months were fraught with difficulties and acrimony. As a result of the political split between Singapore and the Malayan Union, the Malayan Welfare Council ceased to function on a Pan-Malayan basis. A Central Welfare Council took over the coordination of social welfare for the Malayan Union, while Singapore was to have its own council, preferably drawn from the ranks of the Singapore Executive.[129]

After the Singapore Executive's final meeting on 4 June 1946, Vickers wrote to McKerron in his capacity as chair of the committee. His letter was indicative of brewing tensions between government and the committee. The former had intervened – with some success – in the drafting of the charter for Singapore's new welfare council. Members of the Singapore Executive had wanted full autonomy over finances raised by the new welfare council, excluding those from government. The government demurred and Vickers was tasked to get agreement from the Singapore Executive. He attempted "to force this issue", but was met "with a dismal failure" as the Singapore Executive sought the independence to solicit and to manage its own funds.[130] Vickers expressed regret at the "somewhat unhappy ending" especially in view of the "excellent work" done by the organization over a "long and

[127] NAS, BMA HQSD 34/46. File minute, dated 21 February 1946.
[128] NAS, BMA HQSD 34/46. 30 April 1946 meeting minutes.
[129] NAS, BMA HQSD 34/46. See minutes of meetings for the Malayan Welfare Council.
[130] NAS, CSO 1142/46. Letter from W. J. Vickers to Colonial Secretary, Singapore, 5 June 1946.

difficult period".[131] The new Director of Medical Services also suggested an "oblique approach" for controversial matters in the future, commenting that "Public Welfare bodies are usually enthusiastic and often difficult".

A general history of the Malayan Welfare Council and the Singapore Executive in their nine months of existence (from September 1945 to May and June 1946) remains largely unwritten. A primary contributory factor is the rather haphazard collection and organization of the Council's records, if any. In the National Archives of Singapore, Council and Singapore Executive records are scattered across several files, namely BMA 27/45, BMA 64/45, BMA 34/46, and CSO 1142/46. Even then, the creating agency is not always immediately clear: were the records filed by BMA HQ (Singapore Division) or the BMA Chinese Affairs Department. The manner in which records are collected and archived does illustrate to some extent the chaotic and confusing situation during the British Military Administration, which in turn probably affected the maintenance of records then.

The Singapore Executive and the Malayan Welfare Council began on a hopeful note and a fair amount of optimism. They were quickly dashed by limited resources as well as official reluctance to spare the necessary resources to start large-scale schemes, such as mass feeding from "soup kitchens". Money had to be pried from the government, not only for the child feeding scheme, but also for a home for child prostitutes to replace the prewar Po Leung Kuk. The former was almost discontinued, while the latter was only resolved after "a lot of hesitation and doubt".[132] On the other hand, when a potential threat emerged, such as the youth problem, the government found its voice and adequate resources to help establish the juvenile court and one youth club. It was however at the cost of aggravating its supposed partners, the Singapore Executive, in either doing too little, demanding too much, and/or taking credit.

Policy Adjusted: Demands for the "Dole"

The British Military Administration was responsible for the introduction of another welfare initiative, one which preceded the Singapore Executive. On 17 September 1945, a day before the Singapore Executive first met, the government announced the formation of an Emergency Relief Committee to oversee and distribute cash to the needy and destitute. The

[131] NAS, CSO 1142/46. Letter from W. J. Vickers to Colonial Secretary, Singapore, 5 June 1946.
[132] NAS, CSO 1142/46. Letter from W. J. Vickers to Colonial Secretary, Singapore, 5 June 1946.

committee was chaired by McKerron, and included key government officials, Bishop Wilson, Commissioner Lord from the Salvation Army, and representatives from the Chinese community, including the former anti-Japanese guerrilla groups. A relief center was set up at Victoria Memorial Hall. Operations, such as investigations, were primarily managed by Commissioner Lord and his deputy Captain Frank Bainbridge. The government contributed the money and bureaucratic expertise. The decision to dole out cash was not taken lightly. It came about after the military government encountered considerable organized pressure to do more to relieve the distress of the people in Singapore.

On 10 September, seven days before the opening of the relief center, the British began distributing free rice, sugar and salt. However, the relatively peaceful nature of the British return meant food was not as urgently needed as it might have been in a battlefield situation. Instead, in peacetime conditions, money was sought after more, even more so after the British discontinued the Japanese currency.[133] After a day of relief in kind, it was clear to the public, to the business community, and the government that this method of relief was not terribly effective, nor was it sustainable for trade and economic recovery. Prices had moreover skyrocketed, such as from thirty-five cents to thirty dollars for pork, and shops remained closed.[134]

The next day on 11 September, a "relief demonstration" took place outside the Chinese Secretariat building (formerly known as the Chinese Protectorate) along Havelock Road. The relevant file – entitled "Demonstration in front of the Chinese Secretariat for urgent adoption of relief measures" – unfortunately does not tell us much as it carries only two documents concerning this incident. The first was a list of handwritten names in English and Mandarin, and the second a typewritten version of that list (in English) entitled "List of Community Leaders at meeting convened by Brigadier P.A.B. McKerron C.M.G. held at Chinese Secretariat Building on 11 September 1945".[135] There is a curious discrepancy between the titles of the file and the documents within. Was the meeting convened by McKerron and the list compiled by him and his staff; or was he forced to take the meeting by

[133] *The Straits Times*, 10 September 1945, "Singapore's Currency Upheaval".
[134] *The Straits Times*, 11 September 1945, "Shops Closed all Over the City" and "A Hungry Day"
[135] NAS, BMA CH 9/45. List of 29 persons: Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (Tan Lark Sye), Sze Hai Tong Banking Corps, Hokkien Huay Kuan, Ban Hin Lee Bank Ltd., Chinese Rubber Dealers' Association, Overseas Chinese Bank (Lim Bock Kee), Backing up Society of the People's Anti-Japanese Army (Lee Kiu), People's Anti-Japanese Self-Defence Corps (Lee Ah Kwai), Singapore Anti-Japanese Federation (Lee Soong), Singapore Overseas Chinese Anti-Japanese Federation, Singapore Overseas Chinese Welcome Committee (S. S. Sy), Nanyang Press Ltd. (Lee Geok Eng), The United Chinese Bank Ltd. (Ong Piah Teng), Singapore direct branch of the China KMT, Sam Kong Community – A.P.A.

members of the Chinese community demonstrating in front of a government building? There is evidence to suggest that by the evening of 10 September, the British was already considering distribution of cash. This decision however was taken in the context of circulating hard currency to jump-start the economy and controlling food prices.[136] In a press conference, Hone indicated that "unofficial committees" would be set up by his deputy McKerron in "various parts of the town", so as to "bring to his notice cases of extreme indigence in order to provide such relief as may be necessary". Hone also stated that "these committees will be asked to investigate cases of hardship [and] will be fully representative of all races and all interests...."[137] Hone however did not explicitly say that relief would be in cash. The tone of his statements indicate that relief would be in kind, such as rice, rather than in cash.

The British was not given the time to execute their plans. 12 September marked the official surrender ceremony at City Hall. It also marked the occasion of another meeting, the follow-up to the "relief demonstration" the day before, between the British and organized elements of the Chinese community. The Chinese Affairs Department met with representatives from former anti-Japanese groups. Some of them had been present at the previous day's meeting, but this time they were joined by representatives from another forty organizations that were apparently involved in anti-Japanese activities during the occupation.[138] The representatives stressed that "there are people now who have been able to buy no food for a week, and they cannot wait many more days".[139] Cash relief must begin immediately. They recommended the creation of an organization for such a purpose, and informed the British that their organizations were ready and able to administer the investigation and distribution of relief. They demonstrated their readiness by presenting a plan for the establishment of nine centers located at strategic points around the island,[140] the staff to work in those centers, and a list of five expected groups of people requiring immediate relief.[141] All they needed was an estimated budget of $3,000,000 to begin.

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[136] *The Straits Times*, 11 September 1945, "Good news for Singapore: Getting a move on!"
[137] *The Straits Times*, 11 September 1945, "Good news for Singapore: Getting a move on!"
[138] They were identified as 1) The Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army Backing-up Society, 2) The Singapore Overseas Chinese All Circles Anti-Japanese League, 3) The Singapore People's Anti-Japanese Self-Protecting Corps. Attending the meeting were representatives of the Singapore General Labour Union, The Singapore Women's General Association, The Singapore Students General Union, The Singapore Democratic Young Men's League and others that had engaged in underground activities against the Japanese during the occupation.
[139] NAS, BMA CH 9/45.
[140] NAS, BMA CH 9/45. Locations in town and in the rural areas: Geylang, Pasir Panjang, Alexandra district, Jurong, Serangoon Road, Seletar (north), town and suburban area (High street to Kallang)
[141] The groups were the "unemployed, war casualties, homeless, war orphans, resistance fighters (now destitute)".

Interestingly, representatives from commercial and business interests were absent from the 12 September meeting. In addition to the relief proposals, the British authorities were also requested to endorse the eight principles drawn up by the Malayan Communist Party and to destroy remaining Japanese currency.[142] In response, the official informed the meeting that a relief committee had been already put together by McKerron and that it included two representatives from their ranks, Lee Kiu from The Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army Backing-up Society and Lee Soong from The Singapore Overseas Chinese All Circles Anti-Japanese League. Up until then, the British seemed to receive such petitions only from the Chinese community.[143] There is no recorded evidence that the other communities in Singapore made similar representations. Nonetheless, they were included in the relief committee and letters of invitation were mailed to the leading figures of the Muslim, Indian and Eurasian communities.[144]

In view of concerted pressure exerted on 11 and 12 September, the British had to respond. While the relief committee was being formed, the Federation of Christian Churches announced on 15 September (Friday) via *The Straits Times* that it would be distributing cash relief at four locations. The Federation most likely drew on cash advances from the British, given to organizations deemed to be friendlier.[145] On 17 September, the British Military Administration made its public announcement and the Emergency Relief Committee met officially for the first time at Victoria Memorial Hall.[146] In contrast to the Singapore Executive, the committee was chaired by McKerron, the highest authority on Singapore Island. Other important positions were filled by the government official in charge of finance and accounts, and natural allies, such as Bishop Wilson and the Salvation Army. Opening the meeting, McKerron stated that the British fulfilled its promise of ensuring the relief center opened on time.[147]

It was likely McKerron was sending a message to the non-government, mostly Chinese, representatives on the committee, that the British would live up to other promises

[142] NAS, BMA CH 9/45. Letter from S/Ldr James to Colonel Purcell – "Report on meeting of Chinese labour and A-J societies", dated 13 September 1945. The destruction of Japanese currency would not have found favor with the business and commercial interests attending the earlier meeting.
[143] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Draft announcement, dated 14 September, noted the committee should have seven Chinese members.
[144] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. File only included letters of invite to P. Samy Esquire and E. R. Koek Esquire
[145] *The Straits Times*, 15 September 1945, "Four Relief Centres". The centers were located in the districts of Chinatown (Telok Ayer Methodist Church), Geylang-Katong, Paya Lebar (Paya Lebar Methodist Church), and the Central District.
[146] *The Straits Times*, 17 September 1945, "Reconstruction gets under way in Singapore"
[147] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Minutes of first meeting on 17 September 1945, 1150hrs.

made throughout the period of military administration. The events leading up to the creation of the relief committee is one more example of the loss of British prestige and pride in the eyes of the local populace. Through circumstances beyond their control, the British had not returned as triumphant heroes, rescuing their colonial charges from the Japanese. "The world has changed", as one Communist leader observed of a victory procession in Malaya where the "poor people" like her, were leading the *towkays* of a former era.[148] The British were, even more visibly than before, just one of several groups jostling for a leading role in Singapore and Malayan society. From then on, the making and implementation of social policy in Singapore had to be shared with other interested parties.

Interestingly, the provision of relief, in cash or in kind to individuals, is not discussed much in the official records (and if so, usually only in passing or in broad general terms).[149] It is also not fully acknowledged in historical scholarship.[150] Perhaps the significance of relief measures (or perceptions of their significance) pales in comparison to other pressing post-war issues, such as re-establishment of law and order, economic rehabilitation and reconstruction, ensuring the inflow of food and other necessities, and the emergence of anti-colonial nationalistic fervor. But as others have noted, the provision of relief in Malaya and Singapore by itself was entirely "novel within a colonial context".[151] The mere existence of the relief committee and its work are historically significant. The British had a new colonial policy. But financial relief was an unanticipated outcome of that policy. It was the result of local pressures from Chinese groups which were at the forefront of anti-Japanese resistance during the occupation.

The British could not return for three weeks after the Japanese had laid down arms, allowing organized forces already on the ground in Malaya and Singapore to impose their authority in the ensuing power vacuum. Elements of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army moved into the urban areas from the jungles where they had fought a guerrilla war for the past three and a half years. The tragic communal and retaliatory violence during the

[148] Quoted in Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Wars*, p. 58.
[149] It was only mentioned in passing in the official BMA report for Malaya by Ralph Hone, and only for the Mainland division as part of efforts to aid refugees and displaced persons. There is slightly more detail in Donnison's official history of the BMA in the Far East, strangely enough for a broader historical survey.
[150] Discussed in connection to currency issue in Paul H. Kratoska, "Banana Money: Consequences of the Demonetization of Wartime Japanese Currency in British Malaya", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 23, 1992, pp 322-345. Mentioned and expanded on in connection to a new colonial social policy in Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, and Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten wars*. Not mentioned at all in Turnbull's *A History of Modern Singapore*, or articles on British planning and return to Malaya by Anthony Stockwell and Martin Rudner.
[151] Bayley and Harper, *Forgotten Wars*, p. 101.

interregnum has been well-documented.[152] What is less discussed, or discussed only within the paradigm of competing socio-political discourses, were the Communists' attempts at the provision of relief during this period and after the British returned. It is highly probable, in light of the lack of concrete British plans for relief and the readiness of the communist-led elements to assert their authority, the latter forced the former to constitute relief measures in a manner not planned for or even anticipated.

Administering the "Dole"

In contrast to the Singapore Executive, McKerron himself, the head of the Singapore division of the British Military Administration, chaired the first and most of the subsequent meetings of the Emergency Relief committee. This was probably due to the given political situation concerning the organized Communist-influenced groups. But there were also administrative considerations. Former Protectors of Chinese might have some experience dealing with personal issues in prewar Singapore, but they never had to ascertain need and distribute cash accordingly. The British moreover inherited a peacetime population that was not substantially displaced, hence did not require support from the temporary shelters the Refugee and Displaced Persons Department would construct. The Labour Department did provide support in finding work for those who were able to do so. But its effectiveness was limited by the amount of jobs available, the amount of new Malayan currency to replace the discontinued Japanese military script, and as well as adequate supplies of food and other goods to spend the money on. Relief distribution was moreover not a straightforward transaction of providing cash relief to those who completed an application form. There had to be a staff to process the applications, interviewers to assess the information given in the application forms, investigators to authenticate the applicant's need for relief, and a fit and proper structure to handle and distribute the cash. Without the requisite administrative and financial support, the Malayan Welfare Council and the Singapore Executive were never in a position to initiate or take over emergency relief.

The structure of the committee reflected the concerns and considerations discussed above. The Deputy Controller for Finance and Accounts was designated as the Deputy Chairman of the committee, and liaisons from the Labour, Chinese Affairs and Displaced Persons departments were invited to sit in the meetings. Money for cash relief was to be

[152] See for instance Cheah Boon Kheng's *Red Star Over Malaya*.

provided by the "Government, in the shape of the … British Military Administration", the actual work of investigation and distribution was shared with, if not delegated fully to the non-government organizations. It was indeed policy to "make the fullest possible use of all existing charitable and relief organizations, and the voluntary societies which exist in this island, some of which have done much needed work during the Japanese occupation".[153] The Salvation Army, St. John Ambulance Brigade, religious institutions such as the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, and the various Chinese anti-Japanese army groups were such examples. Local initiatives such as the Blue Cross and Black Cross organizations also provided much needed expertise in the provision of social services during emergencies, and was in demand during the immediate post-liberation period.

Expertise in relief work was provided mainly by the Salvation Army. It had extensive experience before the war managing the Silver Jubilee Fund and the unemployment funds. Commissioner Lord acted as Secretary/Treasurer of the relief committee, and his deputy Frank Bainbridge was designated supervisor of the relief center at Victoria Memorial Hall.[154] The relief center was staffed by former Straits Settlements Civil Service officers (mostly local-born and Chinese) from the prewar War Tax Department, providing administrative experience in managing large-scale bureaucratic processes.[155] Bishop Wilson represented the Anglican Church and affiliated Protestant churches, and also acted as the chair of the executive arm of the relief committee.[156] The remainder of the relief committee comprised of local leaders within Singapore society. It was no surprise to see seven Chinese representatives in the committee, given their organized agitation for relief measures well before relief operations were officially constituted. The members were from a cross-section of the Chinese community, ranging from business and banking interests (and with a track record of social service to the colonial government), to those affiliated with the anti-Japanese resistance groups.[157] Three persons representing the ethnic-religious groups in Singapore completed the

[153] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 17 September 1945 meeting.
[154] For a brief biography of Frank Bainbridge, see *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1 January 1938. He was also the "Relieving Officer" of the Silver Jubilee Fund established in 1935/6.
[155] Those officers included a future Minister for Finance and Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore (Goh Keng Swee), a future Permanent Secretary responsible for Jurong Industrial Estate (Woon Wah Siang), and an understated stalwart in Singapore's Legal Service (Monie Sundram).
[156] Sparse meetings minutes of executive arm can be found in NAS, BMA HQSD 115/45.
[157] The original Chinese committee members were Mr. Tan Lark Sye, Mr. Ong Piah Teng, Mr. Lim Bok Kee, Mr. Tsai Kui Shing, Mr. Leong Wan Sing, Mr. Lee Soong, and Miss Lee Kow (aka Lee Kiu).

relief committee, one each from the Muslim (indicated as "Mohammedan"), Indian and Eurasian communities.[158]

McKerron stated that the purpose of the relief committee "was to ensure an organisation for the immediate relief of those on Singapore Island who were in distress either on account of the currency situation, unemployment or any other reason".[159] Relief was to be given to those who, in the opinion of the investigating officers, "have no means of sustenance".[160] He warned that "it is in no way our purpose to inaugurate any form of unemployment relief or the dole".[161] Relief in this particular instance was seen to address an "emergency", the temporary needs of a population and an economy recovering from the exigencies of war. Hence, it was decided that relief should be given in the form of cash to complement relief in kind, so as to help circulate the newly-minted Malayan dollar back into the economy. Initial relief rates were $2.50 per head of a family, and up to $5.00 per family depending on its size, despite concerns by the committee that such rates were on the low side.[162]

In the first week of distributing emergency relief, 1,300 cases were "dealt with", and that number excluded another two hundred or so cases seeking advice in general.[163] Over a hundred bags of rice (ninety), sugar (fifteen), and salt (five) were distributed, and a total of $2,228 was distributed. (This seemed to have kept to the principle of mixing financial relief with relief in kind established by the Salvation Army before the war). After one month, the relief committee had more than twenty thousand cases on relief with more than $200,000 worth of cash disbursed.[164] Relief operations were also decentralized considerably after the first week. In addition to the relief center at Victoria Memorial Hall, there were - at their peak - over twenty relief centers located throughout the populated areas of the island. Those centers were operated by various non-governmental groups, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Federation of Christian Churches, the Silver Jubilee Fund, the Sam Min Cho Yiu

[158] The first non-Chinese representatives were E. R. Koek (Lawyer, Eurasian), P. Sammy (Lawyer, Indian), Dr. H. S. Moonshi (Singapore Muslim Advisory Board, Municipal Commissioner, medical practitioner). There was no overt 'Malay' representation until the Malay Union wrote in to offer help, though there was no evidence of a follow-up. NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. "Letter from The Malay Union (c/o TP Jumat, Supreme Court) to DCCAO (PAB McKerron, Municipal Building), dated 4 October 1945.
[159] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 24 September 1945, minutes of second meeting.
[160] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 17 September 1945, minutes of first meeting.
[161] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 17 September 1945, minutes of first meeting.
[162] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 17 September 1945, minutes of first meeting (Draft version). Those were much lower than the rates given out by the Silver Jubilee Fund before the war. No rationale for the rates are found in the file.
[163] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 24 September 1945, minutes of second meeting.
[164] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Summary of Statistics up to 18th October, 1945.

Youth Corps – an off-shoot of the Kuomintang branch in Singapore, and a Chinese temple organization called the Nanyang Sacred Union.[165] The plurality of the centers – eight of them – belonged to what was termed the "Chinese Resistance Army", likely remnants of the former anti-Japanese army. By the end of 1945, after three and a half months of relief operations, almost $900,000 in cash relief was distributed to over 40,000 cases. To put that number into perspective, the amount of cash relief distributed for the Malayan mainland came up to just $850,000.[166]

Influencing Policy: The Anti-Japanese Army

The number of cases put on emergency relief in the first few weeks were still much lower than what was projected by members of the Chinese Resistance Army. One of them was Lee Kiu, a twenty-six-year-old propagandist for the anti-Japanese army during the occupation (described as possessing a "neo-Jacobin toilette").[167] She was also a relief committee member representing the "People's Resistance Army Back-Up Society", and ensured that information was shared with the general public. She used the postwar press corps to great effect, taking advantage of the relatively liberal approach adopted by the British upon their return.[168] Piqued by what appeared to her as a "dilly-dally approach" to the relief problems of "hunger, unemployment, destitution and death", she gave an interview to the *Sin Chew Jit Poh* on 26 September – about a week after emergency relief began in earnest. Lee Kiu did not hold back. She stated there were at least "700,000 refugees" in Singapore who need immediate relief, and yet the "Relief Committee in the Victoria Memorial Hall is giving relief each day to only about 300-400 persons".[169] She went on to state that her organization had registered over 30,000 "refugees [within three days] and that this was done by dividing the work throughout [nine] districts in the town, each of which carried on its work of registration simultaneously and separately". She noted that the

[165] The Nanyang Union traces its history to the 1930s, when a group of immigrants from Foochow, China pooled resources to purchase a space for temple rites. Information taken from http://chinesetemples.blogspot.com/2005/10/12-nanyang-sacred-union.html.

[166] Donnison, *British Military Administration*, p. 286. Burma was even lesser, just over 400,000 pounds: "It was considered that relief in cash would merely add to the already strong inflationary tendencies, and that as relief had never been given in this form even in peace-time, it would be both undesirable and administratively impracticable to introduce in post-war conditions a system that had been unsuitable in peace".

[167] Observation made by Victor Purcell, quoted in Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Wars*, p. 118. Lee Kiu led the Singapore branch of a Pan-Malayan Women's Federation.

[168] See Harper, *The End of Empire*, chapter on Malayan Spring.

[169] *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 26 September 1945. A translated version of article can be found in NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 1,300 cases were officially recorded for the first week.

"authorities regarding relief" had not given a "clear-cut" answer to her organization's offer of aid by delegating relief work to centers other than at Victoria Memorial Hall. Any delay, she warned, would not reflect well on the relief committee and her own organization.

The newspaper report had the desired result. In the third committee meeting, the committee not only approved the establishment of an additional fourteen relief centers, it also approved a new scale of relief rates.[170] With effect from 1 October – just about two weeks after the start of relief operations, each male member of the household would now receive $5.00 in cash – a one hundred percent increase from the previous rate, and new rates for every female ($4.00) and for every child ($2.00), with a maximum of $20.00 per month for each household – a four hundred percent increase from the previous maximum of $5.00 per household.[171]

The "authorities regarding relief" no doubt referred to McKerron, government officials and perhaps even the organizations usually associated with the British (such as the churches and the Salvation Army) – all of which were quickly discovering they were in the middle of a public relations war. The seemingly straightforward process of providing material assistance to relieve distress had taken on severe political overtones. In the particular case of Singapore and Malaya, the British, whose reputation was already so damaged in the eyes of the local populace, could ill-afford another public failure on the scale of the surrender of Singapore to the Japanese in 1942. We have seen their response to near public relations disasters when dealing with the Singapore Executive on the child feeding and other social issues. In many ways, the Singapore Executive let the government off the hook by not publicizing disagreements. The former resistance groups, battle-hardened and comparatively more organized during those early days, had no such qualms in making public perceived government failures.

To help fight the public relations battle, the military government had within its arsenal a publishing and printing unit, and by early 1946, published some 140,000 posters and notices of a "political nature".[172] The relief committee ensured that the new relief rates and information about the relief sub-centers were sent to "Publicity and Printing" for broadcasting and publishing.[173] Before the end of relief operations, the committee would make several

[170] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Minutes of third meeting.
[171] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Memorandum B circulated at third committee meeting.
[172] Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Wars*, pp. 113-114.
[173] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Minute note stated: "3 copies to sent [sic] priority 1, to Publicity and Printing at 1615hrs 1/10/45, for Broadcasting on 1/10/45, and Publishing on 2/10/45".

more press statements to keep the public abreast of developments or changes in relief operations. Certain individuals from the Chinese Resistance Army also instigated a minor altercation outside the main relief center at Victoria Memorial Hall. On the afternoon of 30 October, Bainbridge was forced to hold a meeting with three young Chinese claiming to represent a group of people unable to receive cash from the "Resistance Army / Anti-Japanese Union" relief centers. According to Bainbridge, the three Chinese appeared to have been coerced to act as representatives as they "endeavoured to convey the impression that they had been compelled by the people waiting outside to make representation".[174] As soon as the meeting began, it was clear that their stated intention was a front for other demands, in particular the reversal of the relief committee's policy to not provide relief to "able-bodied young labourers" if there was employment available.[175]

Herbert Lord arrived midway through the meeting and upon entering the relief center, he witnessed those who had gathered and waited outside the center chanting and shouting, led by someone he called a "professional agitator".[176] Lord stood his ground in the face of the demands but did make one concession. Fifty percent of relief due could be given to able-bodied laborers even if there was work available, as long as evidence was presented to show that they and their families were in dire need. The representatives took the offer back to the waiting crowd who rejected outright Lord's concessions and demanded a hundred percent relief instead. Although they had arrived at an impasse, the representatives were surprisingly amicable (at least to Lord) as they left smiling after shaking hands. The crowd outside also dispersed peacefully, transported away in orderly fashion by waiting trucks.

Lord observed that the agitators were not so much engaged in relief work as they were involved in the strike called in October by the General Labour Union, a front organization for the Communists.[177] If he had acceded to the representatives' demands, it would have meant relief money was being used against the British Military Administration to support the strikers while they were not working. This was not only illogical for the military government, but broadly speaking, such an action also went against the philosophical underpinnings of the emergency relief provided. It was constituted to address urgent temporary needs in the

[174] NAS, BMA HQSD 139/45. Memo re meeting with various representatives of Resistance Army Centres.
[175] NAS, BMA HQSD 139/45. Demands and grievances were, as reported in the memo, relief for those fit for work, logistical issues in getting to the Labour Department, the transportation of cash to the relief centers, and a request for medical aid at the centers.
[176] NAS BMA HQSD 139/45. Memo re Meeting with various representatives of Resistance Army Centres.
[177] Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Wars*, p. 123. See also Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, Gamba, *The origins of trade unionism in Malay*a, Yeo, *Political developments in Singapore*,

aftermath of war and not meant to act as unemployment dole. Lord felt threatened enough by the onset of organized pressure to seek (and did receive) police protection for the relief center.[178] The incident was discussed the next time the Emergency Relief Committee met on 5 November, where Lord reported that most of the demands had been settled and a limited additional rice ration would be given to the staff of the Chinese Resistance Army centers.[179] In a Machiavellian move, Lee Kiu was co-opted into the executive arm of the Emergency Relief committee as well. Following this, there were no other incidents reported.[180]

Making Sense of Relief Work: The Salvation Army Redux

The political ramifications of relief provision were just one of several issues confronting the relief committee, perhaps not even the most pressing one. Relief provision on this scale and in the manner of cash distribution was never attempted before in Singapore. From the beginning, the emergency relief committee was working without precedent, evident by the major adjustments made merely after the first couple of weeks of relief operations. There was also more than a hint of organized chaos during the initial days as the relief workers attempted to make sense of what they had to do.

Tan Beng Neo rejoined her Salvation Army comrades at the relief center, working as an investigator to ascertain whether applicants for relief were genuinely in need of help. Beng Neo recalled that along with cash relief, "a lot of food were [distributed] to the local people" at the back of Victoria Memorial Hall.[181] She remembered that the people "just came and queued up. There were clothing, [there was] sugar. Big tins of lard. So we had to open those tins and took it out in small packets and gave it to them. And knitting needles, wool galore, mosquito netting, cloth, pajamas, tinned food of every kind, shoes". The food and other goods arrived in "lorry loads", and that in the beginning, they were given out more or less arbitrarily and freely, because to the best of Beng Neo's recollection, there was just so much food.[182] Beng Neo's memories provide an invaluable sense of the work processes of the relief center. She remembered applicants arriving at the "front part" of Victoria Memorial Hall to

[178] NAS, BMA HQSD 139/45. Memo re meeting with various representatives of Resistance Army Centres.
[179] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 5 November 1945 meeting.
[180] The records do not show any more conflict between the BMA and would-be antagonists. Indeed, Lee Kiu did present a token of appreciation to Lord in January 1946 for his efforts in emergency relief work. See NAS, BMA HQSD 115/45, 14 January 1946 meeting.
[181] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 16.
[182] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 16. There was wastage as well. Tan recalled having to dispose of fifty bags of sugar, each weighing roughly about fifty pounds, because they had been tainted by kerosene.

register, to complete forms that captured information about "the number of people in the house. The number of the house, where they came from, how many people and so on, you know. And anybody working and also parts of it".[183] Beng Neo recalled vividly several cases, including a woman who had to take care of her children as well as those of her brother's, and a family which had lost all of its male members:

> The grandmother had daughters, daughters-in-law. I think there were about four or five women with more than a dozen children. Some were about thirteen, fourteen.... And some were about six, seven. And all the men were gone. Grandfather was taken away. Uncles, fathers, young men, not married, I think, they had lost about five or six men in that family. They had no means of support whatsoever. I remember they were living somewhere in Whitley Road, in one of the attap houses during that time.[184]

After the applications were completed, she would "go round to find out, see where their living conditions and so on and made my remarks and my recommendations whether they needed any relief or not".[185] It was not easy to look for the addresses written down in those application forms, for the simple reason that the numbers of houses were not in running order. So a supposedly well-prepared investigation officer, with his or her applications arranged in order, would have been bamboozled by disorderly housing. The investigator's senses were assaulted by a variety of sights and smells. Beng Neo vividly remembered the stench of pig farms, the wretchedness of destitution and poverty, and the heartbreaking sight of families mourning the loss of their loved ones.[186]

Through Beng Neo, Commissioner Lord, Captain Bainbridge, and others, the Salvation Army was represented at key positions in the relief organization. Lord was the Secretary-cum-Treasurer of the relief committee, while Bainbridge was supervisor of the main relief center at Victoria Memorial Hall. The inclusion of their expertise went some way in making up for the experience the government and the rest of the committee lacked in relief work. The Salvation Army had managed the Silver Jubilee Fund before the war and its officers were experienced in deciding how relief should be distributed. The file on emergency relief included "analysis of the most frequently recurring types of applications for assistance" and four pages from what was presumably an instruction manual on how applications were to

[183] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 16.
[184] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 16.
[185] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 16.
[186] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 16.

be processed and investigated by the fund's committee of management.[187] It is not immediately clear if this document was circulated before the inaugural meeting of the relief committee. But it contained information as to the different categories of need the Silver Jubilee Fund usually assisted with, and if circulated, would have provided some idea of the types of needs the relief committee could expect.[188]

The days and weeks after 17 September demonstrated the expertise and worth of the Salvation Army and Commissioner Lord in particular to relief operations. Within two days, Lord drew up a list of thirteen types of applications to the relief center which could be referred to other relevant government departments for proper assistance – a list which was later extended to twenty-six types by the second committee meeting on 24 September.[189] Perceived with a more cynical eye, the rather deliberate manner in which applications were "disposed" of in the name of efficiency could have given the impression that the British were not serious about relieving distress – which could have led to, as seen above, Lee Kiu resorting to public pressure.

While opinions differed over the distribution of relief, there was a genuine underlying attempt to help those in need. At the second committee meeting, Lord acknowledged criticism of low relief rates and submitted a "cost of living" statement to demonstrate the inadequacy of the current rates.[190] By the third meeting, the increased relief rates were approved, along with the new relief sub-centers.[191] Lord also understood the public relations game well. He personally drafted several press statements on behalf of the relief committee, and even noted on one occasion that those would bring "good publicity for what the BMA has done for relief".[192] He also queried during one committee meeting as to the whereabouts of the Publicity Department liaison after a prolonged absence.[193]

Commissioner Lord and the Salvation Army played an influential role in the manner in which emergency relief work evolved. After almost a month of relief operations, Lord, using statistical data, pointed out that the main cause of destitution, or more succinctly, the

[187] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Most likely from Salvation Army's own records in dealing with applications to the Silver Jubilee Fund before the war.
[188] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. The memo also provided and described twelve general categories and guidance on alternate sources of help for each.
[189] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. It also highlighted how keen Lord was to ensure relief was tied to work, that is employable persons must find work with the help of the Labour Department.
[190] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. The "cost of living" document is unfortunately not in the file.
[191] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 1 October 1945 meeting.
[192] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 19 October 1945 note to McKerron.
[193] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 29 October 1945 meeting.

chief factor for providing relief, was unemployment.[194] This led to concerns that despite initial pronouncements, emergency relief was turning into unemployment dole. Lord, in a press statement on behalf of the committee, urged "all people in Singapore, whether locally domiciled or here with the Services or in any capacity at all, to employ as many people as possible, either in their personal households or in offices, businesses etc.".[195] Lord went further, suggesting that

> overtime of any sort should be discouraged and where there is too much work for one person to do in the allotted time, it would be a direct contribution to the rehabilitation of the city if two persons were employed. If every person capable of employing labour were to make an effort to increase their staff by even two or three, a very considerable improvement in the present unemployment situation would be noticeable.[196]

This was a significant expansion of the scope of relief services. It was moving beyond the mere transaction of cash or assistance in kind to an attempt to influence other spheres of activities, such as policy-making (for the Labour Department) and business/commercial decisions. It also demonstrated graphically the connections of relief, welfare and social services to other aspects of human activity, that is what was perceived as unnecessary welfare (in the form of cash relief for example) could also have been due to broader socio-economic or even political considerations.

Statistics on the amount of relief disbursed and the number of relief cases was circulated at almost every committee meeting. In claiming unemployment was the main cause for relief, Lord began a gradual process of streamlining relief work to make it more efficient. On 22 October, he produced a memo recommending that while emergency relief should still continue into November, new applications should be directed to and processed at the main center at Victoria Memorial Hall. The branch centers would no longer accept new applications.[197] Lord put this down to an improvement in the "currency situation", as well as a general feeling "that those who have been able to carry on for the first six weeks of the new British regime [were] not emergency cases to be considered by the Emergency Relief organisation".[198] Lord went on to differentiate relief cases roughly into two types: the unemployed but able to work, and those who were unable to work due to more permanent or

[194] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 15 October 1945 meeting.
[195] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 18 October 1945 statement.
[196] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 18 October 1945 statement.
[197] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Commissioner Lord, Memorandum re Emergency Relief, dated 19 October 1945.
[198] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Commissioner Lord, Memorandum re Emergency Relief, dated 19 October 1945.

semi-permanent reasons. He suggested that the Silver Jubilee Fund be reconstituted to take care of the latter group, while emergency relief would continue for the former until conditions stabilized.[199] Lord's recommendations can be viewed in a couple of ways. First, and rather cynically, his recommendations were meant to curb the influence of the Chinese Resistance Army relief centers that had formed a plurality. In his memorandum, Lord noted that by end October, fifty thousand cases representing a "much larger number of individuals" would be assisted. He went on to observe that "this ... is in excess of the number that the representatives of the Anti-Japanese Union suggested was the number requiring relief".[200]

When first introduced on 22 October, Lord's recommendations were not immediately accepted by the Emergency Relief committee. It was not until two meetings later on 5 November that there was tacit acceptance. Even then, it is not immediately clear from meeting minutes whether there was outright support or dissension. The one slight hint of possible dissension came during the 29 October meeting. Probably in response to queries about continuing hardship, it was "stressed" during the meeting "that no hardship need be caused to individual cases [as a result of the changes], which could be reported to the Central Office".[201] It might have been a coincidence, but the very next day on 30 October, agitators ostensibly from the Chinese Resistance Army relief centers gathered and demonstrated in front of Victoria Memorial Hall. Another way of understanding Lord's proposals is in the context of BMA policy that emergency relief was always meant to be form of relief given only during emergencies. This was stated very clearly and forcefully by McKerron during the first meeting of the Emergency Relief committee. Seen this way, the proposals to stop accepting new applications after October and to scale back cash relief were in line with the policy of temporary aid.

Towards a Social Welfare Department

Once introduced however, the government could not control the very striking perception of a government giving people cash assistance, particularly when contrasted with the inaction of prewar administrations. A *Straits Times* editorial highlighted the significance of emergency relief, "The British Military Administration has done what the Malayan Civil

[199] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Commissioner Lord, Memorandum re Emergency Relief, dated 19 October 1945.
[200] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Commissioner Lord, Memorandum re Emergency Relief, dated 19 October 1945.
[201] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 29 October 1945 meeting.

Service stubbornly refused to do: it has given Singapore the dole...."[202] And why not, the author(s) asked. It went on to provide a brief historical overview:

> For many years past the bureaucracy and plutocracy of Malaya has spoke [sic] of "The Dole" as if it were the ultimate social menace. Alarmed by the steady advance of social legislation in Great Britain, and the ever-widening acceptance throughout the civilised world of the principle that a man willing to work but unable to find work because of the faulty functioning of the economic system was entitled to at least a minimum of State support.... The first timorous beginnings of organised poor relief were made during the world slump of 1931-33, but the greatest importance was attached to the principle of giving relief in kind, not in cash.[203]

The historical significance of introducing relief in cash, within the context of Singapore, was not lost. The editorial criticized McKerron's "stout declaration" that emergency relief was not the dole as "an authentic echo of pre-war Malaya". But the author(s) observed that "new times demand new methods". It gave in evidence the depressing sight of "miserable people" queuing up behind Victoria Memorial Hall "every morning, waiting for free rice, sugar and salt", and asked "why should they be submitted to that public humiliation". Though the "new family allowance" given was the bare minimum, it would still allow the "unemployed breadwinner to go to the shop like a normal, self-respecting citizen and buy his own supplies". The editorial ended on a hopeful note, calling emergency relief "the thin end of the wedge of a modern and enlightened policy of poor relief in Malaya".

Internally, Lord's recommendations initiated a reorganization of the emergency relief structure. On 12 November, at the ninth meeting of the relief committee, it was suggested (unclear by whom) that the "BMA Relief should be turned into a more regularly organised civilian form", the first local indication perhaps of the intention towards a government welfare department.[204] By then, the relief committee had accrued sufficient data to present relief recipients into three categories: the "decrepits – unemployables both permanent and semi-permanent", "war victims resulting in the loss of their bread-earners", and "permanent unemployment (able-bodied)".[205] It was also suggested that emergency relief should only be used to help the able-bodied unemployed while the Silver Jubilee Fund and the Malaya Welfare Council Relief Sub-Committee would assist the other categories. On 19 November, McKerron introduced Reverend John T. N. Handy as the government appointee to "make a

[202] *The Straits Times*, 4 October 1945, "The Dole"
[203] *The Straits Times*, 4 October 1945, "The Dole".
[204] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 12 November 1945 meeting.
[205] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 12 November.

thorough investigation into the possibility for coordinating the work of the Relief Centres and Labour departments".[206] The primary purpose of the investigation was to achieve "greater efficiency" by "reducing the number of Relief Centres and employing a smaller staff on a regular paid basis".[207] It would appear that Lord's position was accepted. Emergency conditions had subsided by November 1945 and the number of applications for relief had reached a peak. It was now time to think beyond the military administration. Handy presented his report to the Emergency Relief committee on 3 December. His remit was to make recommendations based on the assumption of "a permanent or semi-permanent Government set-up in liaison with the Malayan Welfare Council to deal with social distress on the Island".[208]

Handy's recommendations were informed by the philosophy that no able-bodied, employable person should be given relief without ascertaining whether they could find work instead. Echoing Lord's suggestions, Handy identified three categories of applicants for assistance: the "unemployables whether due to old age, decrepitude, widows or any other disability", war victims (made destitute by deaths of primary wage-earners, reduced income due to war injuries, because of physical incapacitation), and the able-bodied but unemployed due to "absence of suitable work".[209] He recommended that these categories should be "treated according to their category" and should be assisted "from funds available for their particular need".[210] He proposed that the Central or Head Office at Victoria Memorial Hall remain the headquarters for relief operations, and to have six centers replace the existing nineteen. Four of the six centers would be located in existing Labour branch offices to allow for easier coordination between relief workers and labor officials, and they were moreover chosen because of their proximity to nearby clinics operated by the Medical Department.[211] The rest of the proposal was devoted to administrative and budgetary considerations, and a description of the ideal coordinated operation in providing relief, employment information and medical support (where necessary) to applications for help. The changes were scheduled to take effect from 1 January 1946. No objections or dissension were recorded in the final version of the minutes. One might expect a response from the Resistance Army groups,

[206] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45.19 November 1945 meeting. Background to Handy: *The Straits Times*, 3 October 1950, "Hon. Priest For Seven Years".
[207] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45.19 November 1945 meeting.
[208] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Proposal for the Reorganisation of Emergency Relief, dated 28 November 1945.
[209] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Proposal for the Reorganisation of Emergency Relief, dated 28 November 1945.
[210] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Proposal for the Reorganisation of Emergency Relief, dated 28 November 1945. Proposals were similar to Lord's suggestions during committee discussions.
[211] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Proposal for the Reorganisation of Emergency Relief, dated 28 November 1945.

especially to a change that meant removing an effective means of accessing the general public. What was ultimately recorded instead were the grateful thanks and appreciation of the committee of the "excellent services" provided by the Resistance Army relief centers.[212]

Handy's proposals demonstrated how much overlap there was in taking a broad approach to distress relief. The responsibility had to be shared, either between government departments and non-government organizations (such as Labour Department and the Salvation Army), or within government itself (such as Emergency Relief committee, and the Labour and Medical Departments). There was the need to coordinate with both Labour and Medical Departments because of the complexities of any given individual's situation. Unemployment was perceived to be the foremost cause of destitution during the military administration period. The broader goal was to create employment, as Lord himself had urged the "people of Singapore" to do. Medical care was also necessary so as to keep someone healthy and fit for work (and hence getting them off relief). In an analysis of the applicants for relief from three centers, Lord concluded that while one-third of applicants were able-bodied employable persons, more than half of the remaining two-thirds could not work because after suffering from malnutrition for three and a half years, they were simply not healthy enough to do so.[213]

The Emergency Relief committee did not limit itself to just cash relief. On 5 November, a sub-committee was formed to explore the "ways and means" of starting a feeding scheme at relief centers, school-going children and then the general population.[214] Though no further action was taken due to insufficient resources, the amount of time given to the matter as well as the willingness to try something new belies the supposedly narrow "emergency" scope of the relief committee.[215] The Emergency Relief committee also recommended that the children of "destitute persons" should not pay school fees. They persuaded McKerron to take this up with the Education Department and successfully obtained a concession for the children to pay half the fees.[216]

By December 1945, the number of new applications for emergency relief had stabilized. From January 1946, the weekly committee meetings became monthly, an

[212] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 3 December meeting. Lord also thanked the Church groups. Interestingly enough, similar thanks were also recorded after the 30 October demonstration outside the Central Office at Victoria Memorial Hall and again on 7 January meeting.
[213] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 5 November 1945 meeting.
[214] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 5 November 1945 meeting.
[215] NAS, BMA HQSD 115/45. See minutes of 8 November 1945 meeting of the Executive Committee of the Emergency Relief committee.
[216] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 13 October 1945 and 3 December 1945 meetings.

indication of a more stable environment, accentuated by a discussion whether relief should be given to those from a formerly "better social position".[217] On 17 June 1946, at the final meeting of the Emergency Relief committee, Percy McNeice was introduced as the Secretary for Social Welfare, the head of a new Social Welfare Department. Handy did not recommend the creation of a social welfare department, but he did observe that it was "conceivable that a Welfare Department should, by gradual process, absorb all forms of social welfare within the Island and the staff involved be trained in general Social Welfare work".[218] This is the earliest recorded acknowledgment, within Singapore at least, that a social welfare department was likely to be established.

The military administration period in Singapore and Malaya is understood historically as a transitional period to civil government, and less favorably as a period of corruption and inefficiency. But as Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper have shown, it was a period very much in flux, with new policies and ideas being tested out, one of which was social welfare. To be sure, the state, in the form of the British Military Administration, did not always assume that responsibility comfortably or willingly, as illustrated by the frustrations of the Singapore Executive. But when official authority was threatened, it acted decisively, outflanking a well-organized opponent by distributing cash relief directly to the people for the first time in Singapore's colonial history. The military government might not have planned for emergency relief, and was indeed wary of introducing permanent welfare schemes. But once introduced, it had little control over how they would eventually evolve. The foundations of a new approach to colonial governance, via a policy of development and welfare, had been laid during the six months of military administration. Postwar social policy would be complicated further by the various layers and processes of decolonization. But there would be no turning back from the colonial state's assumption of responsibility for the well-being of Singapore society.

[217] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. 11 March 1946 meeting.
[218] NAS, BMA HQSD 48/45. Proposal for the Reorganisation of Emergency Relief, dated 28 November 1945.

CHAPTER 4. INTRODUCING THE SOCIAL WELFARE STATE

This chapter is the first of a two-part history of the introduction and the impact of an official presence in social welfare in late colonial Singapore. It focuses on the early history of the Social Welfare Department, and examines the attempts to establish social welfare as an indispensable part of government by proving its utility during periods of crisis and in formulating long-term social policy. The Singapore Department of Social Welfare came into being in June 1946, two months after civil government succeeded the British Military Administration.[1] The new department collected under one administrative roof the following: (1) emergency functions overseen by the British Military Administration, such as emergency relief and services for refugees and displaced persons; (2) initiatives introduced by the Singapore Executive, such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau, the Juvenile Court, development of youth clubs, and at a later date, nutritional feeding for children; and (3) prewar Chinese Protectorate functions, such as the care and protection of women and girls, and care for juvenile prostitutes. Accordingly, the Social Welfare Department took over or established several homes and institutions, including: Bushey Park Camp for refugees and the destitute,[2] an orphanage at Mount Emily, a home at Pasir Panjang for rescued prostitutes, an Approved School for boys (on the premises of the prewar Reformatory, along present-day Clementi Road, and a place of refuge for at-risk girls (to replace the prewar Po Leung Kuk at York Hill). All of them remained the core of the Social Welfare Department during the colonial period (and well into the post-colonial period). They provided for thousands of individuals during times of sickness and unemployment, and also gave refuge from some of the worst abuses in society. Taken together, they are one aspect of a new social welfare state that one could turn to in times of need. Even so, they only addressed a minute part of the adverse social conditions experience by the majority of Singapore society. The latter part of this chapter gives an overview of those social conditions, which demonstrate both the benefits and limits of the Social Welfare Department.

[1] The government agency began as the "Singapore Department of Social Welfare". From 1950, the Department was presented simply as the "Social Welfare Department" in official publications, or had its title abbreviated to "SWD".

[2] Formerly located near the junction of Kampong Bahru Road and Keppel Road. The road itself, Bushey Park, does not exist anymore. The entire area is now the present site of a container terminal (Keppel Terminal overseen by the Port of Singapore Authority).

Social Welfare as a Government Function

A separate department for social welfare had not been provided for in the social welfare policy directive issued from London. Ground conditions in postwar Singapore and Malaya probably persuaded the British to establish a stronger, more visible government presence than originally anticipated. Potential alternatives to British rule emerged forcefully after the war. One instance was Malay resistance, effectively organized for the first time against the British Malayan Union plan. As seen in Chapter 3, Communist elements from the former Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, had forced the military government to dole out financial relief. Singapore and Malaya were the earliest British colonial territories to have a social welfare department. Hong Kong did not have one until much later, while individual social welfare officers and advisory committees were the norm elsewhere in the British Empire of the postwar era.

Consequently, there were considerable early efforts to establish a place for social welfare in Singapore's postwar government. The first three departmental annual reports were not mere recounts of key accomplishments and activities of the previous twelve months. Compared to the reports of the more established departments, such as Medical, Labour, or Education, the reports for the Social Welfare Department were arguments for the Department's, and for social welfare's, continued presence in late colonial Singapore. The first report, entitled *Beginnings*, stated unambiguously that social welfare has been recognized as an "identifiable function of Government".[3] One possible reason for the rather brash announcement was underlying resistance to such a notion:

> In the beginning we have found many who wonder whether "social welfare" is a function of Government. Some acknowledge it a necessary Government service only temporarily, in an emergency post-war period; others cleave to the notion that those functions which are not already assigned to existing Government Departments are best performed by religious and voluntary organisations and by private charity.[4]

The report highlighted three areas the Department was an asset. First, the Social Welfare Department was a "skilled agency equipped and able to deal at short notice and on a universal basis with certain social emergencies...." Second, the Department was an "instrument capable

[3] Singapore Department of Social Welfare, *Beginnings: The First Report of the Singapore Dept. of Social Welfare, June-Dec. 1946*. (Singapore, 1947), p. 2. Hereafter *Beginnings*.
[4] *Beginnings*, p. 46.

of co-ordinating the efforts of...non-government and government agencies" concerned with people's well-being. Third, the Department assumed "responsibility for the whole or part of those public welfare services which are not, and conveniently be, or which are only partly, the specific responsibility of established Government Departments".[5]

On the surface, those stated functions seemingly consign the new Social Welfare Department to a "minor or negative role in the machinery of Government". It would be no more than a government agency established merely for emergency response, in contrast to say the Education or Medical Departments, who would have heavier and longer-term responsibilities; or none established for the sole purpose of housing functions and responsibilities other departments did not want. The author(s) of *Beginnings* recognized this, and their rationalizations hence are interesting. The entire passage is quoted below:

> The modern approach to the problems of delinquency, leisure, and want, involves the employment of new methods. The operation of these methods calls for a new kind of instrument. This instrument must be at all times be equally at the disposal of the whole community and so may be best be a government department dedicated to the social welfare of all the people whom it serves. In this context, the vague expression "social welfare" begins to acquire shape and meaning. It is seen as part of the obligation of the community, as the State, to the community, as individual citizens. [Social welfare] sheds all traces of palliation and transience, of casual or sanctimonious benevolence, and it stands out as an essential public service developing a continuing dynamic on its own.[6]

The term "modern" indicated a contrast to "traditional" modes of governance. Before the war, colonial governance in Singapore and elsewhere was, bluntly put, done on the cheap. Unless pressured into action, not much was done in terms of ensuring the well-being of colonial society. After the war, government was positioned, most famously by the Beveridge Report, as the ideal institution to ensure equality, to provide for the benefit of "all the people" or the "whole community". This was in contrast to social services established and provided along differentiated lines, such as ethnicity, language, place of origin or religion etc. The "modern" approach was one that cut across such differences. It aimed at social welfare that went beyond temporary and superficial assistance, but also welfare that was free of judgment and stigma. The above explanation also mirrored Furnivall's "cure" for the ills of the colonial plural society, which was to use a "modern" approach to governance in an attempt to bring

[5] *Beginnings*, pp. 46-47.
[6] *Beginnings*, p. 47.

together both "State" and "individual citizens" into a united community.[7] In a raw fundamental sense, this was nation-building, not in the sense of establishing a political entity, but rather a cohesive community with a common sense of responsibility to each other. Government, via the Social Welfare Department, was the metaphorical glue holding together a new type of society.

Percy McNeice and Tom Eames Hughes, the first two Secretaries for Social Welfare, attempted to accomplish those lofty objectives by legitimatizing and finding a permanent relevance for social welfare in Singapore. In doing so, the Department's early years, roughly from June 1946 to the early 1950s, witnessed rapid and aggressive expansion of state-provided welfare. This included the expansion and consolidation of former British Military Administration and Singapore Executive welfare functions, an aggressive but short-lived colony-wide feeding program between 1946 and 1948, and the conceptualization and execution of two social surveys in 1947 and 1953/4 respectively. The establishment and subsequent development of two sections, for Food and Social Research, reflected the initial intent and shifting fortunes of the Social Welfare Department.

Utility: Food Section

The first major task of the Social Welfare Department was to help alleviate a critical food shortage. In 1946, Singapore and the world was plagued by critical shortages in rice and other staple foods. In Singapore, a black market had already been in existence since the occupation period; the food shortages ensured it persisted after the war. Mindful of potential political and social fallout, particularly in the face of an increasingly hostile labor class, a communal feeding program was introduced to ensure affordable meals at inexpensive prices. The genesis of this program can be traced to the recommendations of the Wages and Cost of Living Committee. In May 1946, an inquiry was commissioned to review the wages of the clerical and laboring class in the light of rising costs of living, in particular the price of food. After hearing the urgent and at times desperate conditions of workers via personal testimonies, the committee made several interim recommendations, which included temporary cash allowances, a ceiling on food prices, the establishment of canteens by government departments and "large employers", and to open "in all large urban areas" public

[7] See Furnivall, *Progress and Welfare*, in particular sections on how nationalism can repair the plural society (pp. 48-49). See also Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 58-62.

restaurants "on the lines of British Restaurants in the United Kingdom".[8] The committee also recommended that the canteens and restaurants "should not be operated under contract but should be run directly by a division of the Welfare Department".[9]

The British concept of state feeding originated at the turn of the twentieth century. A nascent social consciousness, fermented by the labor movement, "social and nutritional scientists, medics, architects, industrial designers, teachers", not only made it "technically possible for the state to assume responsibility for feeding new groups … but required them to do so, by showing the necessity for such intervention".[10] State responsibility for providing food to prisoners and the poor evolved into school and factory canteens for children and workers. This was accompanied by alarming reports of malnutrition, particularly during the Boer War where the physical condition of British soldiers was found to be poor.[11] Wartime conditions, leading to food rationing, were also a catalyst for community restaurants, known as National Kitchens and British Restaurants during the Great War and Second World War respectively.[12] The communal feeding program in Singapore comprised of the People's Restaurants, People's Kitchens (for mass catering), Sponsored and Approved Restaurants.

On 29 June 1946, the Social Welfare Department opened its first People's Restaurant in a converted godown at Telok Ayer.[13] Beng Neo described the restaurant as an "attap shack with barbed wire fencing" and recalled that they managed to sell two to three thousand meals in two hours.[14] The first meal consisted of "rice, pork and vegetables, or rice and fish curry for Muslims, and a mug of iced water".[15] Still part of the Salvation Army then, Beng Neo assisted in managing the operations of a couple of restaurants within the city. She recalled that, as a result of the occupation and postwar food shortages, people then always felt hungry:

> Because you see when people start working in the office…, they cannot afford $3, $4, $5 for a meal…. And rice, of course was on ration. And people wanted

[8] *The Straits Times*, 27 June 1946, "Malayan Cost of Living Report". Full report available in this issue. See also Malayan Union and Singapore – The Wages and Cost of Living Committee, *The interim report of the Wages and Cost of Living Committee* (Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., 1946).
[9] *The Straits Times*, 27 June 1946, "Malayan Cost of Living Report". Quoting directly from *The Interim Report*.
[10] James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 160-1.
[11] Vernon, *Hunger*, p. 91, and chapter 4 in general for the impact of scientific approach to nutrition and social policy in Britain. See also Fraser, *British Welfare State*, p. 177.
[12] Vernon, *Hunger*, pp. 181, 187.
[13] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 17. See also Wong Hong Suen, *Wartime Kitchen: Food and Eating in Singapore, 1942-1950* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet and National Museum of Singapore, 2009), p. 8. "Godown" means "warehouse", and comes from Portuguese, Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada linguistic origins.
[14] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 17.
[15] *The Straits Times*, 29 June 1946, "Cheap Lunch from Today".

> rice. They're always hungry. Well, we were always hungry during the Japanese time. And this sort of carried over…. You always felt hungry during those days.[16]

Each meal was sold at the extremely low price of thirty-five cents. The Social Welfare Department acquired the services of nutrition experts from the King Edward VII College of Medicine to ensure that each meal provided about seven hundred calories, or a third of daily nutritional needs.[17] *Beginnings* describes the process of buying lunch:

> The customer enters by one of perhaps several lanes leading to a ticket box. He buys his ticket and passes on to a long serving counter where the complete meal is handed to him in a mess tin (or an enamel plate) by a server in exchange for his ticket. On his way to his table he passes other counters where he can pick up his spoon and his mug, and dip them in a sterilizer; where he can collect his iced water or his tea and coffee, and additional flavoring according to his own taste. When he has finished his meal he goes out by another door, passing on his way the washing up section, where he leaves his plate, spoon and mug, and then files past yet another counter where occasionally he will find on sale things like fruit, tinned provisions and cigarettes, which otherwise he could only get at inflated prices from profiteering street hawkers, agents for the most part of the black market.[18]

By the end of 1946, ten People's Restaurants were opened, located in a variety of sites, such as "reconstructed godowns" (warehouses), as part of existing buildings and structures, and even one in the "boxing arena of an Amusement Park".[19] The Food Section expanded the feeding program to reach out to more people in a more effective manner. Aimed at the lunchtime working crowd, the People's Restaurants were located primarily within the city, and hence could not serve factories and workshops in "isolated localities". Hence, the Social Welfare Department worked with the Labour Office to sponsor factory canteens, "with the latter arranging permits for the supply of controlled foodstuffs and the former provided the expertise and resources to get the canteens going".[20] This scheme established about sixty Sponsored Restaurants between July and December 1946. Centralized People's Kitchens were also created, with the aim of supplying "any number of ready-cooked meals in bulk to any

[16] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 17.
[17] *Beginnings*, p. 22. This roughly translated into 700 calories, or "2 to 3 ounces (before cooking) of rice or (as an occasional substitute) six ounces of noodles, or 3 1/2 ounces of macaroni or vermicelli; 2 to 5 ounces of potatoes (according to the amount of rice used); 3 to 4 ounces of meat, game or fish; and 4 to 5 ounces of vegetables, usually fresh and including at least one green leaf vegetable".
[18] *Beginnings*, pp. 23-24.
[19] *Beginnings*, pp. 23, 51. The locations included Telok Ayer, Seng Poh Road, Queen Street, Handy Road, Happy World, Katong Kitchen/N[ew] World, Maxwell Road, and Harbour Board.
[20] *Beginnings*, p. 24.

unit anywhere in the Colony which could make its own transport and distribution arrangements".[21] Via the People's Kitchens, the Social Welfare Department served "factories, newspaper offices, banks, shops, Government House, a Trade Union, official Departments and many schools…."[22] At the peak of the feeding schemes in October 1946, the Department served on average nearly forty thousand lunches per day. In six months, the Food Section cooked over one million meals.[23]

Attempts were also made to work with existing restaurants. The Department started an Approved Restaurants scheme, where successful applicants could buy controlled foodstuffs on the condition that the cooked meals were sold at pre-determined prices. Although close to two hundred applications were received, only a minority were deemed suitable.[24] These schemes catered primarily to the working population. They were also there to, in McNeice's own words, to "counteract the black market".[25] It was not enough to provide cheap meals. The word had to be gotten out to the general public that food, cooked and uncooked, was and could be available at inexpensive prices. To do this, the Social Welfare Department and the colonial government made effective use of the print media.

The interim recommendations of the Wage and Cost of Living Committee were announced on 27 June 1946.[26] The next day on 28 June, *The Straits Times* published an announcement that the thirty-five cent lunch was a "reality" – one day before the first People's Restaurant actually opened on 29 June.[27] Lending significance to the event and program, the Governor of Singapore and senior members of the colonial government sat down to lunch at Telok Ayer on the restaurant's opening day, with the image duly reproduced in *The Straits Times*.[28] In the same article, under the sub-heading of "Killing Black Market", McNeice was quoted as saying, "Our main purpose is to reduce prices and to put a stop to the black market".[29] Rumors began circulating that the cheap meals were only possible because of government subsidies.[30] The following month in July, McNeice gave an interview to *The Straits Times*, detailing how the thirty-five cent meal was put together and making public the

[21] *Beginnings*, p. 26.
[22] *Beginnings*, p. 26.
[23] *Beginnings*, p. 24.
[24] *Beginnings*, p. 24.
[25] NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 11.
[26] *The Singapore Free Press*, 27 June 1946, "Living Cost Allowance Proposed".
[27] *The Straits Times*, 28 June 1946, "35-Cent Lunch is a Reality".
[28] *The Straits Times*, 30 June 1946, "Governor Eats and Likes 35-Cent Lunch".
[29] *The Straits Times*, 30 June 1946, "Governor Eats and Likes 35-Cent Lunch".
[30] *The Straits Times*, 13 July 1946, "Alarm in the Black Market".

prices of the various foodstuffs purchased.[31] McNeice declared that all food purchases had been made in the open market (at government controlled-prices), and even after taking into consideration the salaries of the cooks and necessary staff, the feeding program was still able to make a small profit selling each meal so cheaply. He observed that people were still paying too much for food even considering the "high government-controlled prices", and threw down the gauntlet to the black market by offering his services to help any restaurateur willing to sell meals at the Department's prices.

The feeding schemes, particularly the People's Restaurants, were popular. While difficult to assess accurately their impact on the black market and profiteering, they did seem to exert pressure on existing restaurants to give better value for meals. *The Singapore Free Press* investigated a particular restaurant that had consistently flouted the maximum controlled price of three dollars per meal.[32] Although prices at that restaurant did not fall, the meal portions served were much improved.[33] The Sponsored Restaurants scheme also helped carry the message that cheap meals were possible, with more than sixty local companies joining the scheme. For instance, on 19 July 1946, the owners of Singapore's leading Chinese newspaper, the *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, opened a canteen for its staff that sold meals at only ten cents.[34]

The People's Restaurants and other feeding schemes were in the news regularly for the rest of 1946 and early 1947. Between September 1946 and May 1947, announcements under the heading "Today's Menu" were regularly published in *The Straits Times* informing the public of the meal of the day.[35] The high volume of human traffic patronizing the People's Restaurants was given much publicity, as did the opening of new restaurants, Department-operated or under the Sponsored Restaurants scheme, with suitable images of people enjoying their inexpensive meals. A rather subliminal method of inferring the success of the mass feeding schemes can be found in a two-panel illustration published in *The Straits Times*. The first panel depicts a queue of hungry and skinny customers waiting to enter a People's Restaurant. The second panel shows them emerging after their meal physically bigger, visibly

[31] *The Straits Times*, 12 July 1946, "All Restaurants Can Sell 35-Cent Meal – Welfare Officer Shows How It Can Be Done".
[32] *The Singapore Free Press*, 16 July 1946, Untitled. The author noted that $3 per meal was too high, particularly when one could get a meal at $2 in The Savoy in London.
[33] *The Singapore Free Press*, 16 July 1946, Untitled.
[34] *The Singapore Free Press*, 19 July 1946, "Chinese Press Runs 10-Cent Canteen".
[35] Mostly in *The Straits Times* and in English. Cursory scan of other newspapers, such as *Singapore Free Press*, *Malayan Tribune* and selected Chinese newspapers, indicates no similar announcements on a regular basis.

flushed with confidence and energy, ready to take on the rest of the day.[36] Editorials were mostly positive about the impact of the feeding schemes, with one claiming that "Singapore Did Not Starve" due to the Social Welfare Department.[37] It was even suggested that the feeding schemes be part of a coordinated approach to address food shortages in Southeast Asia.[38]

Public opinion, in the form of letters to the press, was more mixed. Some were pleased with the Department's initiative and asked for similar restaurants to be opened nearer to their vicinity. One asked for bigger portions and suggested a forty-cent meal to complement the cheaper meal.[39] Others voiced their suspicions about profiteering.[40] They pointed out the differences between a government agency buying in bulk, and hence at more competitive prices, and an individual being subjected to the whims of the open market.[41] Perhaps of more help and interest to the Department, several letters also pointed out gaps in service, such as a persistent group of women and children loitering around the restaurants and the limits of the initial workers-only objective of the People's Restaurants.[42]

By April 1947, the Social Welfare Department felt confident enough to announce the success of its feeding schemes.[43] In June 1947, fifty-cent lunches were introduced, in addition to the thirty-five-cent version, to meet increasing demand for meals with larger quantities and better ingredients as the general economic situation eased.[44] It was taken as a signal that the hungry customer with additional means wanted more than the cheaper and sparse meal. The demand for the Department's meals fell throughout 1947. For instance, 1,321,115 meals were cooked and served from the People's Restaurants and People's Kitchens between June and December 1946, while the corresponding number of meals for the whole of 1947 was only

[36] *The Straits Times*, 27 July 1946. Illustration by T. H. Peng.
[37] "Singapore Did Not Starve", by Oscar Fernandez, *The Singapore Free Press*, 12 March 1947. See also *The Straits Times*, 21 Oct 1946, "Ikan Bilis on the Menu".
[38] *Beginnings*, p. 29. It was reported that the Department received inquiries on its feeding schemes from China, Hong Kong, India, Borneo, Sarawak and the Malaya Union. See also *The Straits Times*, 31 Jan 1947, "S. E. Asia Winning War On Famine". This put colonial Singapore's efforts on the world map as part of a global fight against food shortages in the immediate post-war era. See also Paul H. Kratoska, "The Post-1945 Food Shortage in British Malaya", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1998), pp. 27-47, and for an insight into food shortages and British attempts at regional leadership, see Tilman Remme, *Britain and Regional Cooperation in South-East Asia, 1945-49* (London: New York; 1995), chapter 3 (pp. 44-53), and Nicholas Tarling, *Regionalism in Southeast Asia: To Foster the Political Will* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 60, 67-68.
[39] *The Straits Times*, 15 Aug 1946, "Forty-Cent Plate?".
[40] *The Straits Times*, 17 Oct 1946, "Cheaper Meals Can Be Cheaper Still".
[41] *The Straits Times*, 24 Aug 1946, "First Hand Experience".
[42] *The Straits Times*, 2 Aug 1946, "His Wife Was Right!", and 28 Aug 1946, "35 Cent Rush".
[43] *The Straits Times*, 27 April 1947, "4½ Million Meals Sold in S'pore – Feeding Schemes Big Success".
[44] Singapore Department of Social Welfare, *The Second Report of the Singapore Department of Social Welfare 1947*, p, 30. Hereafter *The Second Report*.

1,575,640, with the daily average falling from 6,000 meals in January to about 4,000 in December.[45]

With the needs of the working population tended to, attention was turned to those who could not even afford the thirty-five-cent meal. It was recognized early on that the thirty-five-cent meal was not often "within the reach of the poor, the old, the unemployable and the many-progenied [sic]".[46] In December 1946, the first Family Restaurant was opened at Maxwell Road, selling lunch at only eight cents per meal. Benefiting from the bulk purchase of Army foodstuffs, the eight-cent meal had more or less similar portions and nutritional value as the thirty-five cent meal.[47] Demand for the eight-cent meal was sufficiently high – all 2,500 meals were sold out on the first day – to convert three existing People's Restaurants into Family Restaurant before the end of the month.[48] The declining demand for the Social Welfare Department's cheap meals throughout 1947 however meant that it was no longer cost-effective to continue the feeding program. In August 1948, the last of the People's Restaurants were officially closed and other department-operated feeding schemes discontinued.[49] Over two years, close to three and half million meals were served via the People's Restaurants and the People's Kitchens.[50]

It is difficult to say conclusively that the feeding schemes broke the back of the black market or improved living conditions substantially. When asked, a local who survived the occupation thought things did not improve much:

> I don't know. I don't think it improved much. To certain people who are daring to risk black market, this and that, they do make money. But for the working people, I think it's difficult to get work. And things [were] getting expensive. Salary cannot catch up.[51]

The black market that began during the Japanese Occupation continued after the war, abetted by unscrupulous members of the British Military Administration.[52] James Desmond Howard Neill recollected the ill-repute of the military government:

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[45] *The Second Report*, p. 29.
[46] *Beginnings*, p. 28.
[47] *Beginnings*, p. 28. The bulk purchase also allowed the Social Welfare Department to reduce the price of each meal from thirty-five to thirty cents for most of 1947.
[48] *The Straits Times*, 19 December 1946, "Big Rush for 8-Cents Meal".
[49] *The Straits Times*, 12 August 1948, "Restaurants to Close".
[50] Singapore Department of Social Welfare, S*ocial Welfare Singapore 1948: The Third Annual Report of the Department of Social Welfare* (Singapore: Government Printing Office), p. 34. Hereafter *The Third Report*.
[51] NAS OHC, Tan Wah Meng. Japanese Occupation of Singapore. Accession Number 000306. Interviewed in 1987. Reel 17 (of 17).
[52] A substantial number of BMA officials were not military personnel, but rather civilians given military rank (and with substantive business and commercial interests in Singapore). See Lee, *The Syonan Years*, pp. 287-288.

> The cynics called [that] "the black market association" because there were quite a number of people who came out in civilian capacity under special license, under special authority from the War Office. People who'd been in the trading community before the war – expatriates that is. And they were there to make a quick buck and some of their activities were not above board. And they of course went for some local speculators and dealers who were taking advantage of shortages.[53]

Neill had worked in the Food Control Division, working with various organizations to ensure sufficient supplies of basic goods. He remembered being "horrified" when he found out that instead of passing it on to its members, an entire consignment of cloth was sold off by a worker's union for enormous profit.[54]

As shortages in basic necessities continued to meet demand, the black market was easily defeated. Moreover, the high volume of customers during the initial stages of the feeding program in the last six months of 1946 (and large numbers turned away from the People's Restaurants if they came late) did not necessarily indicate the popularity of the feeding scheme. It could have been a case of not having enough food, in particular rice. A rice shortage had been threatening since the beginning of 1946 and by August had deteriorated into a full-blown crisis.[55] The local rice crisis and a global food shortage did put publicity efforts by the Department and the colonial government in a different light. Partly aggravated by cuts in rations, at one point even lower than they were during the Japanese Occupation, strikes in Singapore and Malayan Union reached a peak towards the end of 1946 and at the beginning of 1947.[56] As publicity efforts visibly petered off by the middle of 1947, the initial slew of positive news and announcements seemed a deliberate attempt to placate the population with semi-good news or the sight of government doing something to prevent unrest.

Anecdotal evidence did show that the feeding program forced food prices down. On the last day of the People's Restaurants, the Social Welfare Department observed that the cost of a plate of rice and curry had gone from a dollar fifty down to fifty cents.[57] The wide

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[53] NAS OHC, James Desmond Howard Neill. The Public Service – A Retrospection. Accession Number 000114. Interviewed in 1981. Reel 2 (of 13). Neill was an officer in the British Military Administration and later the Malayan Civil Service. He later became the General Manager and Director of Fraser & Neave Pte. Ltd, one of the oldest food and beverages companies in Singapore.
[54] NAS OHC, James Neill, reel 2.
[55] See Kratoska, "Post-1945 Food Shortage in British Malaya", and Remme, *British and Regional Cooperation*, and Tarling, *Regionalism*. See also Paul Kratoska, *The Japanese Occupation of Malaya*, chapter 11.
[56] Michael R. Stenson, *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948* (London, New York, Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 105. See also Gamba, *Trade Unionism*.
[57] *The Straits Times*, 14 August 1946, "3,500.000 Meals in 2 Years".

proliferation of Sponsored Restaurants – over sixty restaurants were still operating after the official end of the program – was also indicative of a continuing social need. At the very least, the feeding schemes kept the peace during a period of severe rice shortage by acting as a pressure-relief valve. In providing a cheap food alternative, the feeding schemes helped ensure no major social disturbances occurred. Seen this way, the Social Welfare Department's place within government was valuable, at least as a ready-made response mechanism to emergencies. Over a longer term, the feeding program also marked the beginning of a more involved role by the state in late colonial Singapore.[58]

Supporting Social Policy: Social Research Section

A more involved state however does not immediately indicate acceptance of a social welfare department or state-directed welfare. The communal feeding schemes were temporary measures, designed to arrest potential social fallout due to food shortages. On their own, they give less the impression of a social welfare department than a government agency that proved useful during times of urgent need. The Food Section was scaled back considerably after the end of the feeding program, maintaining only one centralized kitchen for smaller-scale activities and potential emergencies. Moreover, the functions the Social Welfare Department inherited from pre- and postwar governments also marked it as a "catch-all" agency, rather than a proactive institution formulating social policy.[59]

In contrast, the planning, execution and implications of a social survey demonstrated longer term ambitions. As early as September 1946, the Social Welfare Department proposed to "institute enquiry into local social conditions by the social survey method". The need for an informed social policy was urgent, the survey report argued, as "social policy in Singapore ... had hitherto been evolved in conditions of poor visibility, where strong currents and dominant land-marks were discernible, but where much of the significant detail of the social

[58] The current Ministry of Social and Family Development cites the feeding schemes as the first "milestone" in its history. Reported in *The Straits Times*, 30 June 2006, "MCYS marks 60 years of serving S'pore".
[59] Social policy, seen broadly, is about "the analysis of access to life-enhancing and life-sustaining resources so that criminal justice or environmental policies are as relevant as wages or housing policies in its consequences for the lives of citizens. Social policy is concerned with the State organisation of social provision". In a more restricted sense, social policy refers to a "welfare regime" for the purpose of ameliorating the needs of citizens, in times of difficulty and through no fault of their own". Lian Kwen Fee, "Is There a Social Policy in Singapore", in Lian Kwen Fee and Tong Chee Kiong (eds.), S*ocial Policy in Post-Industrial Singapore* (Boston: Brill, 2008), pp. 21-22.

landscape was sensed rather than seen".[60] There were prewar social investigations into housing and cost of living, but nothing compared to the comprehensive scale of the proposed social survey.[61] The first departmental report expressed the hope that the "Survey will provide a reliable basis of ascertained fact upon which future social policy in Singapore may be planned in a scientific way".[62] It also explained that:

> Most surveys elsewhere have not had to take account of as large a floating element in the population (due to immigrant labour), and this element is not only largely illiterate but also composed of groups with widely differing traditions, religions, and habits of life. The existence of these complex conditions and the fact that they are at present known, if at all, in a vague and unscientific way often clouded with prejudice, is … one of the main reasons why the Survey is necessary.[63]

Governments since the beginning of time have been collecting data about the societies they administer, namely the census. The social survey, as understood in 1947, was a by-product of responses to industrialization, urbanization, and global economic depressions.[64] At the turn of the twentieth century, individuals with the means and advocating social change conducted investigations into social conditions and urban life. They hoped to uncover the causes and incidence of poverty, and in doing so, to encourage social reform and political action.[65] In contrast, the social survey conducted by government was more "to inform rather than prescribe" and aspired to be part of the discipline of "social science".[66]

Prior to the Second World War, the British government did not utilize the social survey method for policymaking due to the lack of expertise, a lack of consensus over methodology and validity of the social science method, and generally speaking, a lack of an

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[60] Singapore Department of Social Welfare, *A Social Survey of Singapore: A Preliminary Study of Some Aspects of Social Conditions in The Municipal Area of Singapore, December, 1947* (Singapore: Dept. of Social Welfare, 1948), p. 1. Hereafter *Social Survey 1947*.
[61] Notable ones include Cost of Living report published in 1922 as Singapore (City) Municipal Council. *Report on cost of living in Singapore, by occupations and nationalities: As of August 8, 1914; and, by years, from January 1, 1915 to January 1, 1922* (Singapore: Municipal Council, 1922). See also *Proceedings and report of Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Cause of the Present Housing Difficulties in Singapore and the Steps which should be Taken to Remedy Such Difficulties* (Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., 1918).
[62] *Beginnings*, p. 43.
[63] *Beginnings*, p. 42.
[64] Martin Bulmer, Kevin Bales, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (eds.), *The Social Survey in Historical Perspective, 1880-1940* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), see Chapter I.
[65] Bulmer, Bales, and Sklar (eds.), *The Social Survey*, p. 42. See also unpublished conference paper submitted by Social Welfare Department, "Some considerations relating to Social Research in South East Asia". NAS, CO 859/157/4. Copy of paper and minutes can also be found in FO 371/63514 (available in NUS Central Library).
[66] Bulmer, Bales, and Sklar (eds.), *The Social Survey*, p. 42.

over-riding social purpose.[67] But the outbreak of war changed that attitude. In 1940, it created the War-time Social Survey Unit primarily to "determine ... to what extent and in what direction curtailment of civilian consumption could be carried out without impairing factors like public morale and health...."[68] It proved so successful in aiding government to measure the impact of its publicity campaigns and consequently public opinion, the social survey was recognized as an "essential tool in social policy" and retained as part of government machinery after the war.[69]

Postwar Britain and Singapore shared similar concerns, such as food shortages and social and economic dislocation. In Singapore, colonial authority was moreover threatened by a potential alternative in the form of the Communists.[70] There was hence a real need to gauge and to understand public opinion. The Social Welfare Department's varied functions, as well as a general enthusiasm to establish a strong presence, created an urgent need for information to support social policy. The published survey report asserted:

> The Department was a new one and its duty was to deal with certain aspects of the problems of want, of delinquency and of leisure, which had not hitherto been handled by a Government agency specially deputized for the purpose. It became quickly aware that it wanted more facts about the problems with which it had to deal in order to plan its work comprehensively and economically, in order to avoid the pitfall of being merely a purveyor of palliatives, and in order to establish its true position as a primary and necessary instrument of good government.[71]

Social policy in colonial Singapore had hitherto been more reactive rather than proactive. Previously, it took years and considerable effort to get government to respond to social problems, such as public health, housing or labor protection. The 1947 social survey was arguably the first instance where Singapore's colonial government attempted to get ahead of the curve, moving beyond a mere "purveyor of palliatives" to proactively identifying and redressing social ills.

Planning and preparations were meticulous and thorough. A social survey committee was formed. It was chaired by the Secretary for Social Welfare and included a twenty-six-

[67] Roger Davidson, "The Social Survey in Historical Perspective: A Governmental Perspective", in Bulmer, Bales, and Sklar (eds.), *The Social Survey*, pp. 362-363
[68] NAS, CO 859/157/4. Information taken and quoted from conference paper submitted by the Social Welfare Department, entitled "Some considerations relating to Social Research in South East Asia", p. 3.
[69] NAS, CO 859/157/4. "Some considerations relating to Social Research in South East Asia", p. 3.
[70] NAS, CO 859/157/4. "Some considerations relating to Social Research in South East Asia", p. 4.
[71] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 1.

year-old Goh Keng Swee.[72] Destined to become Singapore's principal social and economic architect,[73] Goh was responsible for "most of the spadework at the planning stages, the training of enumerators, the organization of the final survey, and most of the preparation" of the published report. His meticulousness, in many ways, anticipated his approach as a future cabinet minister.[74] The preparatory stages between October 1946 and December 1947 covered a series of pilot surveys, including a major "pre-testing" survey in July and August 1947 covering about five hundred households.[75] By then, a new Social Research Section had been set up to manage the survey. Approval was received to proceed with the survey in June, and the survey was finally conducted in the final two weeks of 1947. A report on the survey was published in November 1948. At that time, the social survey was the first of its kind in Singapore and in the British Empire.[76]

The social survey covered close to 5,000 households residing in the Singapore Municipality area. It obtained and collated data on an extensive list of issues, ranging from the various types of households and housing, the occupation and education levels of wage-earners, to the education of their children and migrant ties to their respective homelands. The survey was more a broad "extensive" collection of social data, rather than an "intensive" investigation of particular social issues, such as the working class' income levels and incidence of poverty.[77] The original draft plan noted that while data on income and

[72] The committee included, George Thomson, the government's Information (or Public Relations) Officer, Dr. C. J. Oliveiro, Acting Professor of Bio-Chemistry at Kind Edward VII College of Medicine, Thomas Silcock, economist at Raffles college, and a government statistician. Several committee meetings were also attended by Alexander Carr-Saunders, Tom Harrisson (then Curator of Sarawak Museum), Raymond Firth, and a representative from the International Labor Organization (ILO).

[73] For studies of Goh Keng Swee and his work, see relevant chapters in Lam Peng Er and Kevin Y.L. Tan (eds.), *Lee's Lieutenants: Singapore's Old Guard* (St Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1999), and in Emrys Chew and Kwa Chong Guan (eds.), *Goh Keng Swee: A Legacy of Public Service* (Singapore: World Scientific Pub. Co. and S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, c2012).

[74] NAS OHC, Thomas Silcock. Education in Singapore, Accession Number 000180. Interviewed in 1982. Reel 16 (of 19). Silcock remembered Tom Eames Hughes, the Deputy Secretary for Social Welfare, as the main drive behind the social survey, while Goh Keng Swee took care of the technical details.

[75] The pilot surveys were meant to test "the workability of various definitions relating to accommodation, to dependents (particularly those "vulnerable" on account of various disabilities) and to family structure particularly in large households". *Social Survey 1947*, p. 3. The pre-testing survey tested the methodology (which used a random sample rather than 100% sample) and the survey schedule (for data collection). It also provided valuable training for student volunteers acting as enumerators, and retrieved practical feedback on the probable factors that could delay the survey. Report was published as part of the *Documents relating to Social Survey 1947*, and was the second of three papers sent on to the Colonial Social Science Research Council for their information in December 1947.

[76] A social survey for the West Indies had been commissioned in October 1945 by the Colonial Office (Colonial Social Science Research Council) and supervised by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). The trials and tribulations of the survey and writing-up process are documented in Barbara Bush, "Colonial Research and the Social Sciences at the End of Empire: The West Indian Social Survey, 1944–57", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (2013), pp. 451-474.

[77] *Social Survey 1947*, pp. 1-2.

expenditure habits of working class households could be collected, their value would be rendered temporary by Singapore's fluid economic situation. In late 1946, when Singapore and Southeast Asia were threatened with famine, Singapore's "price and income structures" were still "in the process of being adjusted", and hence data collected during that particular abnormal period could not be usefully used for future comparison.[78] It was also feared that adopting a particular focus for the survey might be too premature as very little was known about the overall social context. The decision was thus taken to involve all "categories of households" and to design the survey to arrive at a "construction of a general picture of the habits, environment, family structure, etc. of the population within the sample universe".[79]

The survey yielded a broad range of data and information, some of which encouraged a reassessment of Singapore society. For instance, the survey disabused earlier perceptions that local-born Chinese were supposedly more assimilated into colonial society in terms of language, type of occupation and socio-economic status – and like the traditional Straits Chinese community, more loyal to the British Empire.[80] However, more than half of surveyed local-born Chinese workers were holding manual labor jobs, rather than the presumed clerical or professional positions.[81]

Mindful of the migrant foundations of Singapore's colonial society, the survey included questions on "ties with the homeland". Surveyors inquired into the number of times the respondent returned home and the number of times s/he remitted money home.[82] The findings were startling. They showed that the majority of a supposedly transitory group had not returned to their homelands since they first arrived.[83] Moreover, the vast majority of immigrants also had not remitted any money back home.[84] For the first time, a statistical basis was given to show that Singapore's supposedly transient society was gradually more settled. The implications for social policy were substantial. The immigrant, theoretically at least, lacked the familial ties and hence close support in times of need. While extended or adopted families, as well as groupings and institutions based on place of origin, vocation, ethnicity and religion did exist, the effects of war had compromised, during the initial years of recovery, society's capabilities to fend for itself.

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[78] NUSCL, CO 927/79/2.
[79] NUSCL, CO 927/79/2. "Original Draft Plan".
[80] *The Straits Times*, 25 November 1948, "The Chinese".
[81] *Social Survey 1947*, pp. 52-53.
[82] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 109.
[83] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 112. Breakdown per ethnic group was: Chinese: 72%; Indians: 64%; Malaysians: 83%.
[84] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 112. Breakdown as follows: Chinese: 60%; Indians: 42%; Malaysians: 95%.

The survey brought more clearly to light the various problems – existing and potential – confronting individuals and families. 27% of surveyed households were single-person households, theoretically living on their own and hence might not have access to familial or community sources of social support.[85] Compared to similar surveys conducted in Britain, the Singapore survey also found a substantially high percentage of households that had no adult male wage-earner, which meant that the household was supported primarily by the female or a juvenile. This report moreover warned that the figure, about 12% of surveyed households, was a minimum. "Juvenile" in Singapore was defined as sixteen years and below, compared to the British standard of twenty- one years and below.[86] Illiteracy was prevalent. Of the 7,000 heads of household surveyed, 46% had less than three years of education and were deemed illiterate (under the survey standard). 27% had elementary vernacular education and about 10% had elementary and secondary education in English.[87] The survey also found that more than a third of school-age children (defined as seven to fifteen years) were not attending school, of which more than half were girls. This statistic did not moreover include households that sent only some of their children to school, meaning that the proportion of children not attending schools was decidedly much higher.[88]

That inadequate housing and overcrowded living conditions were urgent problems were known long before the war.[89] The main survey finding confirmed in stark (statistical) terms the deplorable overcrowded housing conditions the majority of Singapore's population were enduring, providing a scientific (read: "not subjective") basis for public outrage. The front page of the 11 November edition of *The Straits Times* screamed "Three-Fourths of City Overcrowded". A further four pages of the newspaper were dedicated to the survey report, including a full-page article entitled "Is There a Conscience in Singapore", authored by Thomas Silcock, Professor of Economics in Raffles College.[90] Referring to the report as "a

[85] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 28. 27.1% compared to 11.1% in Plymouth (1931), 8% in Bristol (1937) and in England/Wales (1945).
[86] *Social Survey 1947*, pp. 41-42. 11.8% compared to the below 10% of the British surveys. Figure would have been higher if British standard of 21 years and below was adopted.
[87] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 58.
[88] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 99.
[89] For instance, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 26 June 1937, "Slum Overcrowding: Dr Hunter Hits Out", and 11 August 1939, "Health Officer On "Awful Housing Conditions in Singapore"", and *The Straits Times*, 26 June 1937, "Thousands of Singapore People Live in Hovels". See various annual reports by Municipal Health Officer before the war. See also Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space*.
[90] In addition to "Three-Fourths of City Overcrowded", and "Is There a Conscience in Singapore?", *The Straits Times* issue contained a further nine articles on the survey: "Definition of Terms", "Chinese Illiteracy", "Facts About the Survey", "Analysis of Colony Family Life", "Report is First of its Kind", "More Boys Than Girls go to School", "84 Per Cent Said "No"", "One Towkay in 20 Cannot Sign Name", and "Singapore Rents".

tale of squalor and ignorance and degradation", Silcock's article in many ways represented the moral indignation the social survey could not have in order to retain its scientific objectivity. Recounted in "cold, factual, moderate prose", Silcock wrote, the report was a "tale to shock and shame any who live here, and who are content to let these things be", and that the "white heat of public opinion [demanded] that finance shall be provided and action taken" to right "intolerable wrongs".

The survey findings moreover gave an edge to the increasing number of strikes by organized labor and the tensed political situation then. Singapore and the Federation of Malaya (which had replaced the Malayan Union in January 1948) had been under a State of Emergency since June 1948. Though primarily a jungle war, the Communist insurgency was also a battle for the hearts and minds of the people.[91] The survey findings lent a fair bit of urgency to addressing social problems. During a time when "Communist propaganda is exaggerating every defect of Malayan society", Silcock thought the report was evidence of an "administration willing to face facts frankly, however unpleasant and even discreditable they may be…."[92]

Silcock's comments were echoed in London by the Colonial Office. In 1949, a British parliamentarian – from the British Communist Party– used the survey findings to question the Colonial Office and its intentions to respond.[93] He reiterated that the social survey was an "earnest sign of the Administration's determination, in spite of the emergency, to improve conditions in the Colony".[94] The survey provided a scientific, objective basis not just for arguments for social change, but also fueled colonial anxiety. Poor living conditions give rise to legitimate grievances, and could lead to potential unrest (as happened in the West Indies during the 1930s). A substantial section of Singapore society was not as assimilated as earlier presumed, and hence susceptible to alternative modes of society and authority.[95] All of these views informed and drove colonial efforts to build, or at least attempt to, a postwar society

[91] "Hearts and minds" was a phrase made popular by Gerald Templer when he arrived in Malaya as High Commissioner in 1952. "The answer lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the people". See also Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 310-311. Also *The Straits Times*, 23 November 1952, "Hearts and minds" and *The Straits Times*, 12 August 1952, "Battle that only Asians can win".
[92] *The Straits Times*, 11 November 1948, "Is There a Conscience in Singapore?". Interestingly, similar language was also used for the Governor's Despatch (sic) to London dated 26 November 1948: "The Report reveals gross overcrowding and a high degree of illiteracy, but I feel that the very fact of publication is an indication that the Government of the Colony is willing to face facts frankly, however unpleasant and discreditable those facts may be, and is anxious to the know the truth and accept constructive criticism". NUSCL, CO 953/4/8.
[93] NUSCL, CO 953/4/8.
[94] *The Straits Times*, 28 January 1949, "Govt "Determined to Improve" Colony Welfare".
[95] *The Straits Times*, 25 November 1948, "The Chinese School" and *The Singapore Free Press*, 13 November 1948, "The Social Survey & the Immigrant".

more resilient than the one that fell to the Japanese in 1942.[96] The social survey vindicated McNeice's efforts to establish social research as a necessary basis for social welfare work and social policy, which in turn consolidated social welfare as an essential government function. Singapore had taken the lead in "colonial scientific social survey work", McNeice boasted, adding that its accomplishments had not escaped the attention of the Colonial Social Science Research Council. The pioneering work of Maurice Freedman and Judith Djamour, on the Chinese and Malay family respectively, resulted directly from the Council acknowledging the potential for further research.[97]

The Colonial Office was initially not confident of Singapore's abilities to conduct the survey. When informed in early 1947 of the survey, doubt was expressed by a member of the Colonial Social Science Research Council as to whether the "zealous but amateurish" Social Welfare Department could make sense of the data derived from the survey without guidance.[98] Vague inquiries were also made as to whether a qualified person could step in to assist.[99] In addition, the Chief Social Welfare Officer for the Malayan Union was skeptical of the utility of a social survey "in respect of the changing picture in social conditions" and raised the practical issue of having sufficient trained personnel to carry out surveys.[100] The final survey report was in contrast well-received.[101] Phyllis Deane, then a research officer in the Colonial Office (and a future Professor of Economic History at Cambridge University), thought the survey's limited scope sensible and declared the methodology "soundly based".[102] She suggested that the report should be endorsed by the Colonial Office as an example of an urban survey and copies forwarded to relevant bodies to emulate.[103] Creech Jones expounded on his parliamentary comments in a personal note to Governor Gimson, acknowledging the

[96] Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 56-57.
[97] *The Straits Times*, 28 November 1948, "Singapore Leads in Social Survey".
[98] NUSCL, CO 927/79/2. Minute dated 30 Jan 1947. This was in response to McNeice's letter, dated 17 Dec 1946, to the Colonial Social Science Research Council, informing the Council of the Department's initiative and also requesting for assistance to help with the "many difficulties" encountered. See Bush, "The West Indian Social Survey, 1944–57" for CSSRC's (rather gendered) opposition to Edith Clarke's West Indian Social Survey.
[99] No evidence of follow-up found in CO 927/79/2. Raymond Firth, a member of the CSSRC did arrive in Singapore in August 1947 and sat in at least one meeting with the survey committee. Firth was also involved in the West Indian Social Survey. Formal approval from London however did not seem to be required as finances for the survey were not drawn from Colonial Development and Welfare funds. Instead, the colonial government of Singapore gave the green-light to proceed in June 1947.
[100] NAS, CO 859/157/3. Minutes of Social Welfare Conference 1947.
[101] NUSCL, CO 953/4/8. Report received much praise from the Colonial Office, in particular from the Social Service Department, the Colonial Social Science Research Council and the Social Welfare Advisory Committee.
[102] NUSCL, CO 953/4/8. Born in Hong Kong and a holder of a MA in economics and history, Deane worked as a research officer in the Colonial Office throughout the 1940s. She conducted family and income surveys in the African territories, producing the first national income accounts for Nigeria.
[103] NUSCL, CO 953/4/8. The Singapore Survey was also endorsed by anthropologist Audrey Richards. Efforts were also made to get the report reviewed in scholarly journals to increase awareness and exposure.

survey as the "first serious and extensive attempt to undertake an urban social survey in the Colonial Empire…."[104]

The defensive and slightly strained language in the final survey report and the Social Welfare Department's annual reports reflected the initial lack of enthusiasm and support for the social survey. The annual report for 1947 went as far as to say that even if the levels of available knowledge were higher, "it would still be necessary to measure changes in social behaviour and the social environment as they occur and to tabulate the current habits and attitudes of the people in order to keep policy abreast of its times".[105] The annual report for 1948 boasted that: "The survey also proved what some had been inclined to doubt, namely the applicability of the social survey method, properly used, in the conditions of Singapore".[106] It also highlighted the that "the idea was first conceived in the Department" and that it was the agency of the department's "own officers" that had carried out "this considerable piece of social research...."[107] In contrast to the People's Restaurants and other feeding schemes, the social survey posited a more permanent role for the Social Welfare Department and for social welfare generally. For one, the social survey demonstrated the department's longer-term intentions, and not wishing to become and remain a "purveyor of temporary palliatives".

It is unfortunate that the published survey report did not include more intimate details of the surveyed households, discarded perhaps in the bid to present Singapore's postwar social condition objectively (and hence to be taken seriously). It did however inspire a mini-survey by a *Straits Times* reporter. He found four households of twenty Chinese living in an "attap compound house in the suburbs" on $420 a month. The house had three rooms, one large room partitioned into two to accommodate all four households: "the chief tenant, a woman, her husband and child, her two sisters…, their husbands, and six children, and her brother Robert, his wife and four children".[108] Robert worked as a cashier, earning about $120 per month. He lamented the change in fortunes. He recalled that before the war:

> I earned $80 a month and with one child could afford a servant and save $50 a month. I smoked cigars, drank brandy and went to the cinema, once a week. Now I am in debt, never go [to] the pictures and must work 15 hours a day.[109]

[104] NUSCL, CO 953/4/8. Creech Jones to Gimson, 9 January 1950.
[105] My emphasis. *The Second Report*, p. 6. This statement is an example of the marked change in the colonial state's approach to social issues in Singapore
[106] *The Third Report*, p. 48.
[107] *The Third Report*, p. 49.
[108] *The Straits Times*, 14 November 1948, "A clerk remembers cigar & brandy days".
[109] *The Straits Times*, 14 November 1948, "A clerk remembers cigar & brandy days".

Robert's family was not by any means deprived or in desperate poverty. Robert was educated and had a Senior Cambridge certificate. Rent of the room was $10 every month. The family had access to fresh food, and could afford to send two children to school (at a cost of $4 each a month). The main difficulty apparently stemmed from failing to hold down a job and ensuring a stable family life. In two years, Robert had six different jobs, five of them in "adjacent countries", and had moved his whole family once to their current lodgings.

The living conditions of Robert's and the other households mirrored some of the survey's key findings. They were living in overcrowded conditions. Robert's "12 ft. x 8 ft. x 9 ft." room was "home" to seven persons, his family and a sister-in-law from Sarawak. He, his wife and son slept on a "sleeping bench", while the sister-in-law shared a bed with three daughters. All four households shared one bathroom, and cooking had to be done in shed next to the attap house. The reporter's survey also unearthed a noteworthy factor in the change of Robert's fortunes. While the war and occupation were disruptive, the large family sizes also affected each household's ability to make ends meet. Robert could enjoy certain luxuries, including a servant, when his household was just three individuals. But without a stable and regular source of income, and with a bigger household to support (an additional three children and a relative), Robert had to adjust. He could not afford a more spacious flat because of the higher rent, and had to work longer hours, often coming home after his family was fast asleep.

Such issues and others confronting individuals and families are placed in sharp relief by the social survey, posing questions for social policy to address. For instance, what happens when an individual exhausts the charity and goodwill of their family and friend? How can they improve their living conditions, such as raising a family in a small room located within a "red-light" district? How do large families cope when the breadwinner loses his or her job, due to sickness, injury or old age? What happens to the children and other dependents? What, or indeed how many, options do they have to ward off destitution and to eke out a living?

Social Welfare Ratified: 1947 Social Welfare Conference

To be sure, the Social Welfare Department did not and could not completely address all the social contingencies described above. Nonetheless, by the end of the 1940s, the Department was firmly established as the colonial government's first line of response to

identified social problems. W. H. Chinn, the Colonial Office's Social Welfare Advisor, was suitably impressed by the Social Welfare Department when he visited in 1948: "Singapore may indeed become not only a model of urban social welfare organisation but the training center for welfare in the Far East".[110] However, and despite the efforts of its senior staff, the Social Welfare Department did not attain the influential position some might have envisioned for the department (and state-directed social welfare). Put mildly, the Secretary for Social Welfare, Percy McNeice, and his deputy, Tom Eames Hughes, were forceful – aggressive even – in making the case for the state's involvement in social welfare.[111] As leaders of the Social Welfare Department, even if they were not the authors, they would still have been responsible for the strong language in the first two departmental reports.

These arguments were tabled, discussed, and ratified during an international conference for social welfare held in August 1947. The conference was hosted in Singapore and organized by the Special Commission's Office that was based in Cathay building. The Special Commission was a scion of the British Foreign Office and a by-product of British efforts to establish regional leadership in Southeast Asia.[112] The conference agenda indicated what it meant to do social welfare work from the point of view of government. The agenda included items on postwar emergencies, human trafficking, juvenile delinquency, social research, and more pertinently, the role of government in social welfare and the implications of state-directed social welfare on existing social services.[113] The latter points went against the conventional understanding of social welfare work was best done by voluntary, non-government groups. The Special Commissioner noted the shift in conventions in his opening remarks:

> In many parts of the world the outlook on social welfare has gradually undergone a radical change. At one time all social welfare was considered a matter for voluntary agencies carrying out benevolent work by charitable subscriptions. When charity supports the hospitals, educates the children of the poor and feeds those in want, then this is social welfare for the people. But

[110] Full report in NAS, CSO 2031/49. Quoted also in *The Third Report*, p. 2

[111] Tom Eames Hughes joined the colonial service in 1930s and was in Penang in 1938. He spent the war years in Gibraltar, and arrived in Singapore early 1946. He was transferred to Malaya in 1950 (education), and returned to Singapore in 1965. Information taken from article in *The Straits Times*, 18 December 1976.

[112] Established in January 1946, the initial purpose of the Special Commission was to coordinate efforts to deal with the regional and global food shortage. But the lessons of war and embarrassing defeats had affected British strategic thought, in particular impressing upon them the need for central coordination over disparate entities. The Special Commission was a Foreign Office initiative, and the Special Commissioner reported directly to the Foreign Secretary. The first (and only) Special Commissioner was a seasoned diplomat, Lord Killearn (Miles Wedderburn Lampson), former Ambassador to Egypt and High Commissioner for the Sudan. See Tarling, *Regionalism in Southeast Asia*, and Remme, *Britain and Regional Cooperation in South-East Asia*.

[113] Copies full agenda and listing of papers can be found in CO 859/157/4, FO 371-63514, and SCA 5/47: CO and SCA files in NAS, while NUS Central Library has FO 371 records

> when it becomes accepted that the care of the sick, the education of the children and an adequate diet are the right of all, then these matters become the functions and duty of Government.[114]

The reference in the above quote to the "the right of all" to medical care, education and basic nutrition, referenced postwar sentiments in Britain, where the welfare state was being established. The language was not exactly Beveridge-esque, but nor might a Beveridge-type approach be deemed appropriate for a colonial society with divergent interests and loyalties. Nonetheless, the idea of granting colonial subjects access by right to medical care, education and food, through government, illustrated proactive attempts to reverse prewar colonial policy and practice.

McNeice and Hughes had considerable input in the setting of the agenda, and perhaps even in drafting remarks for the Special Commissioner.[115] Both led a Singapore delegation that submitted the second highest number of papers - seven out of thirty-three submitted in total (and one less than the French Indochinese delegation).[116] Singapore's submissions moreover were the only ones that actively made recommendations, most of which pressed for – at times rather clumsily – the acknowledgment of social welfare as a government

[114] NAS, CO 859/157/3. Conference Opening Address. My emphasis. Lord Killearn's opening address for the social welfare conference moreover included language that would be familiar to students of Southeast Asian history and historiography. He observed that there was a "certain resemblance" in the various social welfare enterprises within the region, "since the countries of South East Asia have much in common". He continued, noting that "the diet of their populations has rice as its staple cereal. The clothing, the social way of life, the dwellings, and such to do with the health of the people are, at least loosely, connected. Agriculture and fishing are the main pursuits. From fishing came travel and the populations absorbed something of each other. In fine, the territories are socially interlinked and it is proper that they should move forward together for progress and development" (Conference Minutes). Such language is remarkably similar to that used by Anthony Reid in his introduction to *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce: Land Below the Winds*, pp. 5-6, and 11: common features partly explained by environment, waterways leading to maritime travel, a human unit connected linguistically, by diet, use of building materials, betel chewing, and the role of women. The one (albeit tenuous) connection Reid has to the conference was through Victor Purcell, whom Reid studied under at Cambridge. Purcell was formerly with the Malayan Civil Service and the British Military Administration involved with Chinese Affairs work. He attended Social Welfare Conference as a representative of ESCAFE. Interestingly, Purcell's later scholarship shows no evidence of a regional approach during academic career, though his work on Chinese migration could be seen as an integrative factor or a shared regional experience. Reid indicated to author (through personal communication) that Purcell did not pursue the idea of regionalism in his scholarship.

[115] The Special Commissioner and his staff were career diplomats and colonial officials, including technical experts on food and nutrition hired by the Foreign Office. McNeice and his deputy Tom Eames Hughes were credited publicly and in official correspondences. See NUSCL, FO 371/63512. Killearn's Closing Address: "We are much indebted to Mr. McNiece [sic] and Mr. Hughes of the Singapore Social Welfare Department for assistance in drafting the Agenda".

[116] Singapore and the Malayan Union were the only territories within the British Far Eastern territories to have a social welfare department. Hong Kong had one only in the 1950s. The French Indo-Chinese delegation had a National Social Welfare Service; New Zealand and the United States did not have a social welfare department, but had national social security frameworks.

function.[117] A social welfare department, as part of overall government machinery, was "far better able to operate social welfare services on a universal basis, in which all benefits are actually available to all citizens...."[118] Moreover, "Government" was in a position to serve the needs of all, as opposed to the "generally more localized" efforts of voluntary organizations or even Municipal bodies.[119] A unified national government could also deal with problems that transcended "national boundaries", such as human trafficking and food scarcity.[120]

Responses to Singapore's arguments were lukewarm, even hostile. At one point in conference proceedings, McNeice grew impatient with his fellow delegates' reluctance to define social welfare. He challenged them, stating that it was the duty of conference delegates to "attempt to define the field of Social Welfare work, and if they shirked it very little would be achieved at this Conference".[121] McNeice's comments were unappreciated to say the least. Exchanges became testy, and included an American observation that Singapore's recommendations were akin to "interdepartmental Empire-Building".[122] Representatives from voluntary agencies and charitable organizations likewise were uncomfortable with the Singapore delegation's position. They were offended after hearing the work they do described as "haphazard", "localized", "improvisations", or "surrounded by an aura of sanctity and benevolence".[123] Miss Scott-Moncrieff, the secretary of the Hong Kong Social Welfare Council, was unconvinced by Singapore's proposals for state involvement in social welfare. Noting that Singapore's proposed approach covered "such a wide field that it is bound to be a little totalitarian in its outlook", she reminded everyone that "freedom of association is one of the fundamental bases of democracy". She added, rather pointedly, that "all the British social measures were not given to them from above by a benevolent government, but had been fought for by the people".[124] Another delegate likened a paper,

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[117] The Department's arguments were especially plain and direct in three papers: "Social Welfare as a Function of Government", "Economic Aspects of Social Welfare Services", and "Some Considerations relating to Social Research in South East Asia". These can be found in NAS, SCA 5/47. No copies available in CO 859 or FO 371 records in Singapore collections.

[118] NAS, SCA 5/47. My emphasis.

[119] NAS, SCA 5/47.

[120] NAS, SCA 5/47.

[121] NAS, CO 859/157/3. Conference Minutes.

[122] The East Indonesian representative queried the need for separate Social Welfare and Labour departments. The Chief Social Welfare Officer for the Malayan Union thought that it was "impossible to give a definition of social welfare work which would fit all conditions in all places and at all times". The American and New Zealand observers thought it was premature to come up with definitions. The latter highlighted the smooth running of welfare work despite the absence of a social welfare department in New Zealand, which at that point in time was a leader in social security policies. NAS, CO 859/157/3. Conference Minutes.

[123] NAS, CO 859/157/3. Conference Minutes.

[124] NAS, CO 859/157/3. Conference Minutes.

which suggested concentrating the aged, sick and incapacitated in dedicated centers and homes, to Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.[125] The conference did end with resolutions ratifying a role for government in social welfare, but it was highly unlikely that detractors were sufficiently convinced to bother adhering to those resolutions in their home countries.

With the benefit of distance, it could have very well been a case of the Singapore delegation's bark being worse than its bite. The proposals put forward for social welfare vis-à-vis government and the functions proscribed were residual in essence rather than overly interventionist or totalitarian. Despite the rhetoric about the limitations of non-governmental agencies, the idea of partnership – as espoused in the social welfare policy directive – was never discarded.[126] What fueled Singapore's proposals was perhaps less British earnestness, and more British insecurity in the wake of the Second World War. Seen this way, social policy, or at least the promise of social reforms, became "an exercise in the reorientation and preservation of colonial power".[127]

Social Welfare for the Long Term

Still, the idea of a new approach for the postwar period appealed to sections of Singapore society. A *Straits Times* editorial remarked that the war had given the British administration "a fresh start", to "crystallise and co-ordinate" the prewar welfare activities operated by a disparate group of government and municipal departments and private agencies.[128] The same article also noted that the Social Welfare Department represented the "most significant departure from the old order". It promised a "New Deal" – in a hat-tip to Franklin Roosevelt's introduction of Social Security in the United States – for the people of Malaya and Singapore who had suffered for three and a half years under the Japanese. The article warned that the remnants of "Old Malaya" had not gone away, as evidenced by a planned meeting to "save the privileged classes of Malaya from paying income tax to finance social services for the under-privileged classes". Still there was hope, as the "addition of

[125] NAS, SCA 5/47. Responding to a section in paper entitled "Economic Aspects of Social Welfare Services": "First then, it is wasteful and inefficient that persons who fall into these categories [the aged, the sick and the incapacitated] should be maintained in separate households all over the country; it is likely that they need regular treatment or at any rate periodical medical inspection. It is surely a waste of national resources if doctors and nurses have to make visits for this purpose to the homes where the persons live. Concentration into centres, homes, institutions or hospitals would lead to greater economies when the matter is viewed from the angle of the country rather than of the individuals".
[126] See also Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 60.
[127] Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 62
[128] *The Straits Times*, 19 August 1947, "More Talk at the Cathay".

Social Welfare to the recognised functions of Government" was a social gain from the "catastrophic break in the continuity of Malayan history".[129]As noted earlier, social welfare presented itself as a useful "soft power" option during a period of nationalism and decolonization in Southeast Asia. The social welfare conference took place in the midst of hostile industrial action, food shortages, a dislocated society, and the emergence of the Communists and nationalist groups vying to replace the British.[130] Reporting the publication of the first official report of the Social Welfare Department, *The Straits Times* observed that Singapore's best defense against the "propaganda of the Communist Party" was not the "political branch of the police, but Social Welfare in the spirit in which it is now conceived and administered as a function of Government".[131] It also observed that the Department was the "one department where Government becomes human to the ordinary citizen, where the humblest caller can be sure of a patient, sympathetic, helpful hearing".[132]

Seen this way, the postwar Social Welfare Department had replaced the prewar Chinese Protectorate as the government agency to turn to in times of need. Social welfare officers investigated appeals for help, provided financial relief, acted as probation officers, managed youth clubs and hostels, took care of the aged and incapacitated, orphans, and gave protection to at-risk children. In each of those capacities, they listened, provided information and counsel, and attempted to resolve problems brought to them in a manner not very different from that of the Chinese Protectorate. Compared to the colony-wide impact of the feeding schemes or the social survey, such work was in contrast a less exciting and more mundane daily grind. But their significance was not any less. Together, they formed the basis of social welfare work as done by the late colonial government, a foundation that continued well into the post-colonial period. The Food and Social Research sections were respectively discontinued by the early 1950s and detached from the Social Welfare Department in 1958. On the other hand, departmental sections like Relief (later Public Assistance), Settlements, Women and Girls, Children and Young Persons, Youth, and Counselling and Advice persisted – albeit in different forms – throughout the Social Welfare Department's history.[133]

[129] *The Straits Times*, 19 August 1947, "More Talk at the Cathay".
[130] Conference also took place in regional nationalism and global decolonization. In 1947, Indonesia and Vietnam were in the process of being, fighting the Indonesian National Revolution (1945 to 1949) and the First Indochina War (1945-1954) respectively. In April, a general election was held after Burma reached agreement with Britain, and became an independent state in January 1948. A week before the conference, India and Pakistan had also attained independence.
[131] *The Straits Times*, 23 August 1947, "Beginnings in Singapore".
[132] *The Straits Times*, 23 August 1947, "Beginnings in Singapore".
[133] See various annual reports of the Social Welfare Department (SWDAR) for changes to departmental sections and functions.

Social welfare was part of the late colonial government's effort at a coherent social policy. Preparations for long-term plans for education, healthcare, housing and social welfare began as early as 1947.[134] By1948, the shadow of the Communist insurgency loomed large in the government planning. The Governor of Singapore felt obliged to give reassurances that the various plans made by his government would not remain "schemes on paper". He observed that "Communism makes the spurious claim that it alone cares for the welfare of the masses and also claims that this welfare is ignored by so-called capitalist governments", and warned that "the Government must not lay itself open to criticisms that due attention has not been paid to the welfare of the common man".[135]

A Five-Year plan for social welfare was published in July 1949 and approved in principle by the Legislative Council at the end of the year.[136] In real terms, the plan was predominantly a building project, such as buildings and other physical structures, to support social welfare activities. The immediate goal was to expand and develop youth welfare services. In 1949, the Social Welfare Department was directly managing an orphanage, a home each for at-risk girls and juvenile prostitutes, an Approved School for boys, three boys' clubs and one hostel, and over a dozen child feeding centers ran by volunteers. By 1953, the child feeding centers were to be converted into eighteen permanent children social centers (for those between infancy and six years of age). The plan also aimed to have a total of nineteen boys' clubs, six girls' clubs, sixteen hostels (eleven for boys and five for girls,) and several camps and camping grounds for youths – most if not all to be housed in new buildings. New facilities and buildings were also planned for destitute children, for children with physical and mental disabilities, a Junior Approved School to complement the existing Approved School, a permanent site for juvenile prostitutes, and a new remand home to segregate the juvenile delinquent from the orphaned or homeless child. A formal probation service, with trained staff, was also to be established.[137]

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[134] These included the Singapore Housing Committee's *Report of the housing committee Singapore, 1947* (Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., (1948), the Education Department's *Singapore Department of Education ten-year progranme: data & interim proposals (1949)* (Singapore: The Dept., 1949), and the Medical Department's *The Medical Plan for Singapore* (Singapore: Printed at the Govt. Print. Off., 1948).

[135] *The Singapore Free Press*, 19 Oct 1948, "They won't be paper plans only". See also *The Straits Times*, 16 Feb 1949, "Improve the People's Welfare – Gimson Tells Council".

[136] *The Straits Times*, 20 Oct 1949, "Unanimous Support for 5-Year Welfare Plan". Before approved by the Governor, the plan was vetted by a select committee in the Legislative Council. The Select Committee agreed with most of the recommendations, and recommended government acceptance of plan. See NAS, CSO (Colonial Secretary Office) 5735/49, "Report of the Select Committee on the Social Welfare Five-Year Plan" Council Paper No. 80 of 1949.

[137] Singapore Department of Social Welfare, *Department of Social Welfare - Five-Year Plan* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1949), pp. 5-8.

A longer-term objective was to rationalize social assistance, which had developed in an *ad hoc* manner during the British Military Administration period. This included Emergency Relief and two settlements for the destitute and the invalid (usually victims of the war). Social assistance was defined in the Five-Year Plan as "the active intervention of Government to aid its citizens in any circumstances in which such assistance may be needed".[138] Such assistance however should not be permanent, "except in cases of old age and permanent disability", and should moreover be given with the "explicit purpose of restoring a person's capability of being a productive element in the community".[139] The benefit in doing so was preventive, as in preventing poverty and reducing costs over the longer term.[140] The plan called for a rational system of disbursing financial relief to individuals in genuine need, and to create a "rural settlement" to house the "permanently destitute and homeless persons".[141]

The saying about best laid plans is an apt description for the slow progress after the Five-Year Plan was approved. The 1950 departmental report lamented the "hinderances [sic] and alterations" that caused building delays, and more tellingly, the "considerations which tended to place Social Welfare Department projects at a low level of priority".[142] By 1951, though some progress was made, the focus had shifted to one of "consolidation and improvement of already existing activities...." The plan was not even mentioned at all in the departmental reports for 1952 and 1953, the latter supposedly the end-point for the Five-Year Plan.[143] The rapid expansion of the Social Welfare Department witnessed earlier had stalled. Various reasons contributed to this, not least instability due to staff movement and political developments, the "distraction" of the Communist insurgency, and being saddled with residual functions as feared earlier.[144] After McNeice and Hughes departed in 1949 and in 1950 respectively, there were at least four different Secretaries in a space of about three

[138] *Five-Year Plan*, p. 9.
[139] *Five-Year Plan*, p. 9.
[140] *Five-Year Plan*, p. 9.
[141] *Five-Year Plan*, pp. 9-10.
[142] *Report of the Social Welfare Department 1950* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1951). Hereafter SWDAR (Social Welfare Department Annual Report).
[143] There was an attempt to follow-up with a second Five-Year Plan sometime in 1953 or 1954. This is elaborated in Chapter 6. See NAS, SWD 328/55. This was not publicized, probably overtaken by constitutional developments.
[144] The National Archives of the UK (TNA), Cab 129/76, "Report on Colonial Security", 23 April 1955. Templar devoted one section to the conflict between welfare and law and order. He observed that the "large sums" spent on welfare could have been directed to improving law and order first: "Improving economic conditions do not always mean political tranquility; on the contrary, the desire to see improvement accelerated is a potent source of unrest".

years.[145] Staff movement at the lower levels also hindered social welfare work. For instance, the Social Research section was only fully active whenever Goh Keng Swee was free from his studies in London. Political and constitutional developments moreover could and did complicate government work. The various Secretaries for Social Welfare answered directly to the Colonial Secretary (also known as the Officer Administrating the Government), and hence had plenty of latitude for independent action. When the Rendel Constitution came into effect in 1955 (which provided for limited self-government in Singapore), the position of Secretary was "downgraded" to a position that reported to a Minister via two senior civil servants.[146]

The Communist insurgency also impeded social welfare expansion. Governor Gimson forewarned of such a situation, observing that it was "tragic" that resources had to be channeled to internal security measures during a time when social reforms were badly needed. But until "security of the individual from oppression" exists, "measures for social improvement, however great their priority, must take a second place".[147] As the Communist insurgency escalated, the Social Welfare Department was saddled with new, more urgent, functions. Genuine threats from the Communists and a policy of community-building via mass adult education (as community development was understood in Malaya and British Africa) meant new duties for an already short-staffed department.[148] Against the backdrop of Communist agitation, youth welfare accelerated, mainly via the establishment of more youth clubs throughout the 1950s.[149]

Still, if seen over the long term, such moments were mere ripples, the *histoire événementielle* or "episodic history" so to speak.[150] They crashed furiously into view at particular moments, demanding attention because of their immediate severity. But eventually they dissipate, breaking up on the breakwater that are the "everyday" structures and needs of

[145] Also noted by WH Chinn, the Colonial Office's Social Welfare Advisor. See NAS, CSO 2031/49.
[146] The Labour Front, led by lawyer David Marshall, won a plurality of seats in the new Legislative Assembly. See for an introductory overview of political developments leading to 1955, Yeo Kim Wah, *Political Development in Singapore, 1945-55* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1973).
[147] *The Singapore Free Press*, 19 Oct 1948, "They won't be paper plans only".
[148] Community Development first appeared as a social welfare function in 1950 (See SWDAR for 1950), and as part of Civil Defence thereafter. Community Development was a relatively new government function. Initially known as mass adult education, at its broadest, "Community development … was about involving people in a community in educating themselves to improve the circumstances of their lives through health, agriculture, civic education and mass literacy schemes". For a historical overview of its origins and development, see Rosaleen Smyth, "The Roots of Community Development in Colonial Office Policy and Practice in Africa". *Social Policy & Administration*. Vol. 38, No. 4 (2004), pp. 418-436.
[149] The number of youth clubs increased substantially, from eight clubs in 1948 to a peak of thirty-six in 1955. Reporting on the youth clubs became less detailed after 1955.
[150] This draws on Immanuel Wallerstein's translation of Fernand Braudel's concepts in "History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée". *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2009), pp. 171-203.

social life. The scope and reach of social welfare, as envisioned in the Five-Year Plan, were undeniably curtailed, but not drastically affected by political developments and imperatives. Decolonization, the political struggles, and eventual independence did not fundamentally change the core structure and functions of the Social Welfare Department, such as the care and protection of women and girls, children and young persons, the destitute and the homeless. Constitutional developments did not change the fact that people continued to fall sick, grow old, or sometimes meet unfortunate accidents, getting injured and becoming unemployed. They did not prevent marital issues, child care worries, bread-and-butter concerns, or any other mundane but important day-to-day living concerns. In such moments, individuals and families may need information or guidance navigating through such moments, and if necessary, relief in kind or otherwise. And if for one reason or another they were unable to turn to their families and communities for help, the Social Welfare Department and its officers were present. Financial relief from the state was available for those in need. Though not placed on a statutory basis, Emergency Relief was formalized as Public Assistance from 1951 with clearly delineated categories of need.[151] Concurrently, the Social Welfare Department also distributed other forms of financial relief, including allowances specifically for tuberculosis (from 1949), allowances for sickness in general, and grants from the revived Silver Jubilee Fund.[152] A Poor Man's Lawyer service was established as part of the Department's Counselling and Advice section in mid-1952.[153] This succeeded the earlier *taijin* sessions of the Chinese Protectorate. Social welfare officers at one time or another had to counsel or give guidance on personal matters, such as advising on the number of children, on finances, on medical problems, on underage sex consoling the abused and harassed, chiding errant spouses (of both genders), mediating family disputes over marital and/or financial problems; and moreover, not all the time successfully.[154]

[151] The categories of need were: the aged, persons suffering from advanced tuberculosis, widows and orphans, the disabled (permanently or temporarily), and the unemployed. Until 1 August 1951, relief rates still adhered to the BMA emergency relief standard, which were $5 for a male adult, $4 for the female adult, $2 for each child under sixteen years of age. The new rates allowed up to $10 or $15 per month for head of household, and a corresponding $4 or $5 for each dependent. To qualify, the applicants must have resided in Singapore for at least three years. See SWDAR for 1951, pp. 35-36.
[152] SWDAR for 1951, pp. 37-40. The Social Welfare Department also managed two other relief funds, The Far Eastern Relief Fund and The Malaya War Distress Fund. See SWDAR for 1951, pp. 40-42.
[153] SWDAR for 1952, pp. 4-5.
[154] Extracted and abridged from the oral histories of Chia Cheong Fook, Janet Yee, Cecilia Nayar, and Ann Wee. See Chapter 6 for fuller elucidation of their experiences.

The Benefits and Limits of the Social Welfare State

The intent of the colonial state to provide social welfare, manifesting in the creation of a Social Welfare Department, meant a new experience for individuals who came into contact with the prewar colonial state. Augustin Gomez for instance had been repatriated to India during the Great Depression. He survived the war and returned to his prewar job as estate manager in Malaya. But a conflict ensued with his boss, and he resigned in 1948. By then, he was fifty-three years of age. Employment opportunities were few and gradually limited by younger, more energetic (and far less expensive to hire) workers. He was thereafter unable to find permanent employment. In 1949, an illness depleted his meager savings and exhausted the goodwill of friends and family in Kuala Lumpur. The following year in 1950, he moved to Singapore to seek help from his daughter (who had earlier moved to Singapore from India).

Family assistance however was limited. Still suffering from a chronic medical condition (arthritis), Gomez' situation was brought to the attention of an almoner (a medical social worker), who helped with his application to the Social Welfare Department for financial assistance. In 1952, he received nineteen dollars under the Public Assistance scheme, which was later increased to thirty. At that time of the research study (in 1958), he was still receiving Public Assistance. He was staying with his daughter's family, who was also having its own difficulties making ends meet. They lived in a "two-roomed wooden and corrugated iron structure" in the middle of an "undeveloped squatter area off Jalan Eunos". There was no running water, and they had to share a "common-pit latrine" with several other households. Gomez' own prognosis was poor. It was highly unlikely he ever returned home to India, nor had he particularly wished to do so – in order to continue receiving financial from the social welfare state.[155]

After liberation, Valentine Frois's work life was punctuated by bouts of illnesses (beriberi and a persistent stomach ailment), probably caused by malnutrition during the Japanese Occupation. Frois found work with several shipping agencies but ill health ensured he could not stay long in any one position. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1954. His then employer paid his medical bills for the first three months, but eventually asked him to leave with a month's pay. Frois continued looking for work, but his advanced age (fifty-eight

[155] Coelho, "Old Man on Public Assistance". Augustin's treatment at the General Hospital, which included medicines and a short hospital stay, was apparently free of charge.

years old in 1954) was against him and he grew increasingly dependent on his family and his Catholic parish. After the latter was unable to help him regularly, he finally took his priest's advice and reluctantly applied to the Social Welfare Department for aid. Starting in 1955, fifty-nine-year-old Frois received fifteen dollars every month. Even so, in 1958, he still kept active, taking advantage of a clean bill of health after recovering from tuberculosis. To repay his friends, Frois helped out with odd jobs to supplement his monthly Public Assistance, and kept an eye out for more permanent work. He did not expect much though, as prospective employers simply shrugged him off after hearing his advanced age. Though healthy, Frois expected to depend more on his family and friends, community, and the state for the remainder of his years.[156]

Public Assistance was also given out at the other end of the age spectrum, children in or near poverty. When M. Subramaniam was five or six years old, his father suddenly died from tuberculosis (either in 1948 or 1949). As the entire family of five (mother and four children) had lost its only breadwinner, they were placed on Public Assistance, "given social assistance" as he recalled, by the Social Welfare Department. On turning sixteen, his elder brother left school to work and help support the family. The Social Welfare Department again stepped in to assist when that brother fell sick with tuberculosis. It was not easy growing up in deprived circumstances, as the entire family had to survive on twelve dollars every month. Most of the time, they were eating rice with only dried fish (*ikan bilis*). (He recalled a bowl of rice with a piece of dried fish cost about twenty cents. This would have been during the late 1940s and early 1950s). At age thirteen, Subramaniam took on part-time work to supplement the family's meager income.[157] Things took a turn for the worse when Subramaniam's brother-in-law was killed in an industrial accident in 1963. Suddenly, his pregnant sister became a widow, and her other three children fatherless. They moved in with Subramaniam, who was already supporting his mother and elder brother, who was recovering from tuberculosis. At twenty years of age, saddled with additional responsibilities, Subramaniam started work as a proof reader in the Government Printing Office.[158]

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[156] Coelho, "Old Man on Public Assistance".
[157] NAS OHC, M. Subramaniam. The Public Service – A Retrospection. Accession Number 003036. Interviewed in 2006. Reel 2 (of 6).
[158] He played a significant (if understated) supporting role in Singapore's sudden independence on 9 August 1965, as part of the team that printed the documents proclaiming Singapore as an independent republic. To prevent leaks, his team was kept under lock and key on 8 August (Sunday) until the Singapore government was ready to make the announcement the following day on 9 August 1965. See Lee, *The Singapore Story*, p. 645. Hear also Eddie Barker's OHC interview in NAS: Political History in Singapore 1945-1965. Accession Number 000193. Interviewed in 1982. Reels 1 and 2 (of 3).

The above examples demonstrate how a social welfare state assisted individuals and their families during times of need. They also illustrate the limits of the Social Welfare Department. The Social Welfare Department only assisted with specific categories of need, usually those near or already past the point of destitution. The cases above were complex, such as health concerns, overcrowded living conditions, and weakened family and community support, all not easily solved with the mere provision of cash. For Gomez and Frois, the war had been extremely disruptive. Though they survived, they came out of it less healthy, to say the least. They were also older workers in a postwar colonial situation, which might have been more sympathetic to their plight, but at the same time did not provide many employment opportunities. As novel as it was, the Social Welfare Department could not create jobs, did not have the mandate to build houses to ease overcrowding, nor could it treat or cure disease. Social conditions in postwar Singapore were daunting, and much of it was beyond the Department's scope of functions and services.

Overcrowded Living Conditions

Singapore's population swelled from a prewar estimate of 600,000 to almost a million in 1946, mainly as a result of the influx of refugees and other transients during and after the war. The increase in physical numbers exacerbated food shortages, worsened overcrowding and poor living conditions (predominantly within the city limits), and tested British capabilities to prevent a breakdown in law and social order. Singapore's flourishing entrepôt trade economy came to a virtual standstill during the war. Time was needed to get it up and running again, which also depended on restarting the estates, mines and other industries up north in the Malaya peninsula. The necessary recovery time led to a shortage of jobs, which in turn limited the flow of hard currency to bolster the economy. Moreover, in the midst of food shortages, the black market thrived, abetted by unscrupulous members of the military government, who had no enemy to fight and plenty of time (and incentive) to loot and profit.

Such circumstances only added to despairing individuals and families attempting to just get by from day to day, while living in "almost inhuman" conditions. For much of the postwar years, the majority of Singapore's population lived within the city itself, near the hub of economic activity. In November 1946, a *Singapore Free Press* reporter wrote:

> Today Chinatown is congested – over-congested, it might be said. Masses of humanity are crammed into it. Chinatown is full – but more are coming into

> it.... "Almost inhuman" was the description given by a prominent Singapore Health Officer to the conditions under which a large part of the city's cubicle dwellers existed. The situation is worse today. Where formerly a tiny cubicle in Chinatown housed a man, his wife and an annually growing family, today, in many instances, it holds a portion of some other family as well.[159]

The same report also noted that "Singapore's slums have become "slummier", the increasingly congested living spaces led to fears of a "great increase in the incidence of tuberculosis and pneumonia".[160]

The 1947 social survey found that close to two-thirds of surveyed households lived in overcrowded conditions,[161] 21% lived in "Acutely Overcrowded" conditions,[162] while another 15% lived in what was categorized as "spaces", a category that refers to a living environment that was "grossly overcrowded", which was one stage worse even than ... "acutely overcrowded".[163] The incidence of households living in "spaces" gets higher (between 16% and 26%) when limited to households living within the "Inner City" wards.[164] It was a problem with no geographic distinction. The incidence of overcrowding in the "Outer City" wards was not as acute, but still stood at more than 50%.[165] The most damning statistic was that 80% of households lived in accommodation consisting of only one room or less.[166] The percentages given above are in terms of households. In terms of individual persons (the survey covered over 19,000 persons), 74% of them were living in overcrowded conditions, of which 7% were living in "spaces".[167] Most of them belonged to medium and

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[159] *The Singapore Free Press*, 16 May 1946, "House Shortage in Singapore Slums".
[160] *The Singapore Free Press*, 16 May 1946, "House Shortage in Singapore Slums".
[161] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 78.
[162] *Social Survey 1947*, pp. 77-78. "Acutely Overcrowded" meant that there were more than four adults per room or more than three and a half adults per cubicle, going by a Municipal Standard of 350 cubic feet of space per adult. The survey report warned the standard was "lax in the extreme as it would permit a man and wife and four children under ten, or four adults of different sexes to occupy one room without being graded as overcrowded". Page 78.
[163] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 79. The "space" category "covers households whose sole habitation consisted of places like bunks in passage ways, the tiered bed lofts common in Singapore, sleeping shelves under or over staircases, sleeping arrangements in five-foot ways, kitchens and backyards and other places used for sleeping without ordinary enclosures or partitions. Parts of places used for sleeping which during the day-time was used for other purposes such as shops, factories, offices, etc. were also classified as "spaces"".*Social Survey 1947*, p. 70.
[164] The Inner City area stretches from Keppel Road in the west to the end of Victoria Street in the east, demarcated by New Bridge Road and Serangoon Road to the north. The Outer City wards include areas in and around Tiong Bahru Road, Havelock Road, River Valley Road, parts of Alexandra Road, Bukit Timah Road (until Coronation Road), Balestier, Serangoon Road, Macpherson Road, Paya Lebar Road and Geylang Road (until Siglap Road).
[165] *Social Survey 1947*, pp. 71, 78-79.
[166] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 75.
[167] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 81.

large households (four persons and more).[168] In plain numbers, that meant each of some fourteen thousand people was living together with at least four other persons in a single room.

In 1948, a newspaper report on Singapore slums presented a reporter's personal encounters with such dwellings in more graphic detail:

> Built of rotting pieces of salvaged wood, a one-roomed shack (I hesitate over the word "room" – "enclosure" would probably be more appropriate) with, at the most an over-all floor space of not more than 25 square yards, and containing no facilities for sanitation or ablutions, was the average dwelling I visited the other day.... It was almost impossible to approach within a stone's throw of these awful, decrepit looking huts without - after first taking the precaution of rolling my trousers to the knees - wadding through pools of stagnant water and picking my way over stinking rubbish dumps. Presently, after balancing precariously on "stepping-stones" of discarded bits of rusting metal. I managed to reach the squalid piles of pots and pans, broken boxes and drunken structures of wood which, incredible as it may seem, were the homes of human beings. I took considerable risk that afternoon, from T.B., dysentery and most other diseases which abound and breed in the stinking mires of filth where these homes are situated. Yet, people live there! They eat whatever food they can manage to forage from the society which allows such a squalid existence to be possible. They bring up their luckless children in this same horrible and disgusting environment.[169]

In November and December 1951, *The Straits Times* published a series of articles featuring the various plights of children in Singapore and the Federation of Malaya. The first, "Their Playground is the Gutter", described a common-sight living space in Chinatown – in the author's words, a "hovel":

> We pass through the narrow street doorway into a dank passage. At the far end lies the tiny communal kitchen which serves 60 people. At one side there is a line of charcoal fire places, and the steam from the inferior rice bubbling in pots mingles with lines of dripping washing hanging from the ceiling – if the rotting, broken boards partly open to the sky can be called by such a name. Outside is a lavatory, and a Shanghai jar. It is not a pleasant place for, like the kitchen, it serves 60 people. We have to climb an almost vertical ladder to reach the living quarters. Another passage runs across the top, too narrow for two persons to walk abreast. It is lined with splintered shelves holding bundles of pots and pans, sacking, and a few piles of garments, for this is store room, pantry, wardrobe and dumping place. Eight "rooms" lead off the passage. We don't need to knock at any door for most of the tenants are around us wondering why we have disturbed their privacy. After all, it practically the only thing they have left – privacy from outsiders that is – for they certainly have none of their own. We go through the first door into a three-yard-square

[168] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 28. 24.4% of total households had six persons and more.
[169] *The Singapore Free Press*, 19 January 1948, "Singapore's Slums". Authored by Eric Mitchell.

> space; smaller than our bathrooms at home. Four people live here, mother, son and two daughters. A wide board jutting out of the wall and taking up half the room is their bed. A length of oil cloth tacked over it gives some protection from the bare wood, but we do not see any covers. They hardly need them for there is no window, and the only fresh air flows sluggishly over the gaps between the ceiling and wall tops. These people do not even have walled-in rooms. They are cubicles, not affording the privacy of a horse box. They cannot know the luxury of a private family quarrel. Nothing is secret, not even marital relationship, which above all things a man and his wife have a right to keep to themselves.[170]

When the visitors finally left the dank, overcrowded dwelling, they became aware of a "burning sensation" around their elbows. They discovered a "mass of large white bug bites", the consequence of coming into contact with the lice-infested walls in the interior of the house.[171]

Still, despite the squalor, they found the people living within were "as clean as it is possible for them...." For some, albeit brief, respite from such conditions, the residents spent much of their time outside their homes. Similarly, *samsui* women spent most of their evenings along the five-foot ways below their lodgings, partly for leisure and other forms of social interaction, but also to escape the stifling confines of poorly ventilated living spaces.[172] Even so, leaving the confined space might have not brought much-needed relief, and perhaps even more danger. The visiting party noted that the absence of amenities, such as parks or playgrounds, meant that the children it encountered played "on the streets" near the dwelling, streets that were "bordered by monsoon ditches – ditches filled with floating, sodden debris...."[173]

Physical dangers were not the only concern. Since he could not return to his prewar job at the British naval base, Wong resorted (again) to hawking fruits to make a living. In 1951, he was living with his wife and four children (an elder daughter from a previous marriage and three sons) in a back room of a two-story bricked terrace house, renting the 14'

[170] *The Straits Times*, 4 November 1951, "Their Playground is The Gutter".
[171] *The Straits Times*, 4 November 1951, "Their Playground is The Gutter".
[172] Information taken from Tang Chee Hong, "The Cantonese women building labourers: a study of a group of Sam-Sui women in the building trade". (Unpublished academic exercise--Dept. of Social Studies, University of Malaya, 1961), pp. 50-52. The *samsui* women are female laborers from the Sanshui district of Guangdong province in southern China. They are identified by their distinctive red-colored headscarf. For a recent sociological study on the *samsui* women, see Kelvin E. Y. Low, *Remembering the Samsui women: migration and social memory in Singapore and China* (Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press, 2014).
[173] *The Straits Times*, 4 November 1951, "Their Playground is The Gutter".

x 12' x 10' space (168 square feet) for thirty-five dollars a month.[174] Wong's family shared the second floor with two other sub-tenants who occupied two front rooms, and all shared the same bathroom, W.C. and kitchen. The ground floor was a laundry-shop. For a family of six, the bedroom was small and cramped. There was space for only one bed, which the wife and youngest son occupied at night. The rest slept on mats on the floor. Space was however not Wong's major concern. The terrace house was located along a major "thoroughfare" that cut through a known prostitute haunt. The street bustled with activity towards the evening and well past midnight. Wong preferred to stay elsewhere for the welfare of his family, but could not afford the higher rent of a Singapore Improvement Trust apartment. He was extremely uncomfortable with his fellow sub-tenants, as he suspected one of them was grooming two very young girls (aged eleven and four) for prostitution.[175]

Singapore's housing problems remained relatively consistent throughout the 1950s and into the early 1960s. For various reasons, not much headway was made to alleviate overcrowding despite surveys and plans made by the British colonial government via the Singapore Improvement Trust, the colony's *de facto* housing authority after the war.[176] Cramped living conditions, and the accompanying concerns for public health and safety and general social well-being, remained fairly consistent throughout the 1950s. The findings of a social survey conducted in 1953-4 by the Social Welfare Department and a sociological study conducted between 1954 and 1956 of residents in a particular Chinatown locale further confirmed an unchanged, and in some instances, worsening, situation.[177] Housing in

[174] She had eloped with a seaman against her father's wishes. Chia Cheong Fook recorded the story in an appendix to the diploma thesis. See Chia, "The place of the hawker", Appendix.
[175] Wong did not want to say much about the other sub-tenants. Chia noted Chinese prostitutes and their "amah" pimps plied their trade nearby, and the extended surrounding area was a major "red lights" district. It was also frequented by Malay, Indian and Eurasian prostitutes. He mentioned in his oral interview that the hawker worked in the Jalan Besar area. NAS OHC, Chia Cheong Fook, reel 2.
[176] The Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) was established in 1927. Its initial mandate over the maintenance of the back-lanes of houses within municipal limits and general improvements to living conditions was only expanded to include the construction of low-cost housing in 1932. The official report that led to the establishment of the SIT is the *Proceedings and Report of the Singapore Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Cause of the Present Housing Difficulties in Singapore and the Steps which should be Taken to Remedy Such Difficulties* (Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., 1918). Prewar shackles remained after the war, obstructing and undermining SIT efforts to expand house-building activities. See *Singapore Housing Committee, Report of the Housing Committee Singapore, 1947* (Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., [1948]). In *Squatters into Citizens*, Loh Kah Seng presents an aspect of housing history in in Singapore via the Bukit Ho Swee fire of 1961. See also Brenda Yeoh's *Contesting Space*, for a perspective of the SIT via the context of colonial management of prewar urban Singapore, and Chua Beng Huat's *Political Legitimacy and Housing: Stakeholding in Singapore and Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*, for the role of housing in social engineering.
[177] See Goh Keng Swee, *Urban Incomes & Housing: A Report on the Social Survey of Singapore, 1953-54* (Singapore: Dept. of Social Welfare, 1956), and Barrington Kaye, *Upper Nankin Street, Singapore: A Sociological Study of Chinese Households Living in a Densely Populated Area* (Singapore: University of Malaya, 1956).

Singapore was only addressed in a concerted fashion with the establishment of the Housing and Development Board in 1960 by the People's Action Party government. Even then, it was merely a beginning rather than a miraculous overnight transformation. Until then, thousands of families lived in overcrowded conditions that exposed them to various threats, ranging from structures or objects that might injure, poor sanitation, air- and water-borne diseases, to fires and floods.[178]

Social Dislocations

Adding to an overcrowded and rough physical environment, Singapore society was severely, and in some cases permanently, dislocated by war and occupation. Some cases could be as straightforward as the loss of a limb or suffering a major injury, incapacitating the individual and rendering him or her unable to work. Other more tragic instances involved the death or prolonged absence of the main breadwinner, usually male. All of which placed tremendous stress on the remaining members of the family, on the surviving widow or widower and their children. The following case, heard in the Juvenile Court in December 1946 and described in full in the newspaper report, gives a good illustration:

> Next was Soon Nah, a 12-year-old lad who wore a tattered blue smock. The charge was read out "In Rochore [sic] Road he was caught trying to hawk 100 packets of Players cigarettes without a licence during a raid on hawkers".
>
> I admit the offence, he said in a whisper. A basket with a pink label attached with the cigarettes inside was produced as Exhibit A.
>
> How old are you? said Captain Chua [The presiding magistrate].
> Twelve years old, sir.
> Why did you sell the cigarettes?
> I have no money, Sir, and I have a mother but no father.
> Where is your father?
> He died in the Jap occupation.
> What does your mother do?
> Washes clothes for people.
>
> The magistrate asked if she was in court, and she stepped forward, looking sad and bewildered, to stand beside her son.

[178] See Loh Kah Seng's *Squatters into Citizens* for an overview of the impact of fires in squatter areas on housing policy.

Why do you send your son to sell cigarettes?
We have not enough money to live on now that father is dead.
Does your son go to school?
I can't afford to send him.
How many other children are in your family?
One daughter, 9, and one boy, 6. This one is the eldest.

Again the magistrate conferred with the unfortunate couple, and then he said: "As this is a first offence I bind the mother over in the sum of $100 to see that the boy does not sell cigarettes in the next twelve months. Case dismissed".[179]

After Soon Nah, The Juvenile Court heard three other cases. One was for eleven-year old Ah Tee, who was caught stealing cloth and apparently gave the police force "considerable trouble" before being arrested. Another was a tough-looking, "large-framed lad" charged with theft. He claimed trial at the Juvenile Court as he told the police his age was under sixteen years. Suspicious, the Court ordered him to be sent for a medical examination to determine his age. Finally, there was Kow Tow, a "veteran" of two previous convictions of pick-pocketing and a former resident of the Salvation Army Boys' Home. He was part of a gang who had robbed and assaulted (with a bicycle tire) a man for his milk tins. Kow Tow was only ten years old, and the gang he was with had "three other little boys" of similar ages.[180]

The cases above reflected the deprived postwar conditions and the consequent desperation of individuals and families. As the eldest son, Soon Nah shared the burden of supporting his mother and siblings by selling cigarettes (illegally). Ah Tee, Kow Tow and his gang, were not pulling off grand robberies, but thefts of common, everyday necessities, like cloth and milk. They also reflected the criminal path some Singapore youths were already on. War and occupation interrupted the lives of Singapore's youths. Their education was disrupted. Some had their families torn apart. Others were forced to relocate from familiar surroundings. The basic instinct to survive required children, who otherwise would be attending schools and leading active social lives, to find work to support themselves and their families. When gainful employment was scarce, they turned to illegal activities to find the income they and their families needed. The occupation period also exposed the Singapore youth to the raw and violent use of power. Those old enough would have witnessed firsthand the humiliating defeat by the Japanese of the supposedly invincible British. Those less fortunate might have also experienced at close quarters acts of wanton brutality by the

[179] *The Singapore Free Press*, 20 December 1946, "Dead End Kids of Singapore".
[180] *The Singapore Free Press*, 20 December 1946, "Dead End Kids of Singapore".

Japanese soldier. Hence, the Singapore youth came through a wartime society where might makes right and previous societal norms were meaningless.

Understanding this context brings into sharper relief the Singapore Executive's emphasis on youth welfare, on restarting schools, prewar youth organizations, and establishing new youth clubs. The emergence of nationalistic fervor for the competing Nationalist and Communist factions in China further complicated matters, particularly when sentiments turned inwards and against the British in the form of anti-colonialism. The observation that the youth problem was the "biggest social problem" confronting Singapore was rather perceptive.[181] Students and youths were at the epicenter (or near it) of several significant moments in Singapore's history during the 1950s and 1960s.[182]

Pressures on caregivers and breadwinners took their toll on families in other ways, sometimes in more tragic fashion. In November 1946, *The Straits Times* published a story on unwanted babies abandoned at the Sisters of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus. The convent had been taking in on average about four to five babies every night, almost always at night as the mothers did not want to be seen. It reached a point where two sisters had to be stationed at the gates all day and night. This was to quickly claim and care for the newborns, as they arrived usually "wrapped in old rags or newspapers, so undernourished and so ill they have little chance of survival".[183] The convent had been taking in unwanted babies since before the war, and received public support mostly in the form of food, clothing and toys for the children. After the war, such support decreased while the number of unwanted babies at the convent's doorstep increased. It took in ninety-six babies between October and November 1946 alone. The Reverend Mother informed the reporter that about 90% of the babies die. Some almost immediately, others after a few days or months despite medical care. Very few survived to grow up strong and healthy. The convent took care for life those who grew up "crippled, blind and dumb". The unwanted babies were all girls and all Chinese. The reporter observed:

> These babies are doomed before they are born. Their mothers are undernourished, ignorant and often syphilitic. At birth they have no trained

[181] *The Straits Times*, 14 April 1946, "Social Welfare Department for Singapore".
[182] See for example Loh Kah Seng ... [et al.], *The University Socialist Club and the contest for Malaya: tangled strands of modernity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), Tan Jing Quee, Tan Kok Chiang & Hong Lysa (eds.), *The May 13 Generation: The Chinese middle schools student movement and Singapore politics in the 1950s* (Selangor: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, c2011), and Poh Soo Kai, Tan Jing Quee, Koh Kay Yew (eds.), *The Fajar Generation: The University Socialist Club and the politics of postwar Malaya and Singapore* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: SIRD, 2010).
[183] *The Straits Times*, 14 November 1946, "Tragedy of Singapore's Unwanted Babies".

> midwife, no proper care, and the babies are often injured. Most of them are covered in sores and many are deformed at birth. Many are brought in tetanus of the umbilical cord because they were severed from their mothers with ordinary unsterilized knives. I saw an ashen-grey baby of a few months, its tiny frame contorted with convulsions and its lungs wrestling with pneumonia. Sister St. Angela said this baby would certainly die during the day.[184]

It was highly probable that several if not most of the babies under the convent's care belonged to mothers who were prostitutes. By the 1950s, prostitution was well established in Singapore, feeding on to some extent the nature of the colonial economy and the society it fostered.[185] Recollecting his time in the Women and Girls Section of the Social Welfare Department, Chia Cheong Fook observed that some of the prostitutes he encountered had "hardened" perspectives on life.

> Some prostitutes, they are hardened themselves. They don't feel that they… [Recounting a conversation from memory]: Why did you go into prostitution? What else have you got to do? You got no money; nobody to support me. Somebody asked me to work, I work.[186]

He came across brothels of varying types. There were the well-kept establishments he remembered along River Valley Road, while those in the Jalan Besar area were, in his words, "revolting";

> 47 Desker Road – I remember this because it was such a dump! The prostitutes were fairly mature, old – forty-seven, fifty years old. Visited by these sailors, white British seamen and all…. The first thing, they'd head [to] one of these brothels…. It's not a brothel, it's a hovel. Two or three beds, three of these bunks piled together.[187]

Recounting another incident:

> I knew of a case who had come to us for some help…. There's a pretty girl who was under sixteen… We raided the place because we heard that this *lorong* [Malay for lane or road] something that she was offered to a rich man who wanted a [virgin]…. There's a superstition that if you are an old man and you want to be reinvigorated, you get one of these virgin girls.[188]

[184] *The Straits Times*, 14 November 1946, "Tragedy of Singapore's Unwanted Babies".
[185] For history of prostitution in prewar Singapore, see Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki-san.*
[186] NAS OHC, Chia Cheong Fook, reel 3.
[187] NAS OHC, Chia Cheong Fook, reel 3.
[188] NAS OHC, Chia Cheong Fook, reel 3. In Mandarin, the term for a virgin girl was *kai bao* (开包).

The second article of *The Straits Times* feature on children focused on juvenile prostitution and human trafficking. It introduced a girl named Ah Meng. Ah Meng was the eighth child born to an extremely poor family living in the Federation of Malaya. Her father realized he could not afford to keep and raise her. In time, a neighbor stepped forward and took in the girl, seeing in Ah Meng a potential bride for her own son in the future. Ah Meng received no education and when she was older, about fourteen years of age, she worked as a seamstress. But it was not enough for her "foster mother" who was looking for payback on her "investment". One day, Ah Meng was taken with a "parcel of clothes" to a friend of the "foster mother". The child was led to believe that the lady friend would teach her to dance so as to work as a dance hostess.

Ah Meng arrived in Singapore the next day, and was immediately handed to another woman. The ease in which this was done illustrated a well-established chain of child traffickers. In this manner, "poor, bewildered little Ah Meng changes hands five times for the sum of $1,500 before she at last reaches her destination – a room in a brothel".[189] Ah Meng tried to escape that very first night. But she was "in a strange city and has nowhere to go…." She did not know to whom or where to go to for help. She was caught before she got far, and was bundled back into the brothel.[190] Ah Meng endured for a few more months, servicing on average six to seven men per day. Her basic needs, such as food, accommodation and clothing, were well-provided for. But she never received a cut of her earnings from her pimp. Ah Meng made a second, more successful, escape attempt, and found her way (via a friend) to the Social Welfare Department seeking shelter and protection.

The feature reporter, Kathleen Hickley, confirmed with sources from the Social Welfare Department that Ah Meng's story was a familiar one. Hickley had begun the article innocently enough. She noted that the sparse paragraphs of news articles, such as "A woman who used her 14-year-old daughter for the purpose of prostitution was sentenced by the Muar magistrate to six months' simple imprisonment", or "The anti-vice squad discovered a seven-year-old girl in a house of ill-fame in the company of two men…", could easily go unnoticed. But "those few words tucked away in the news pages are indicative of more drama, more horrifying situations, than the most pungent book you can find in any library". Hickley also laid out in stark terms the long-term implications of allowing such situations to go unchecked. "Beneath [those words] lies yet another story of our children, the children of

[189] *The Straits Times*, 11 November 1951, "Traders in Human Merchandise".
[190] *The Straits Times*, 11 November 1951, "Traders in Human Merchandise".

Malaya, who will soon be parents of a new generation. Will this second generation have to face the same iniquitous life as their parents did?"[191]

Disease

Hickley and *The Straits Times* published several more articles on the plight of children, each more hard-hitting than the last. In "An Invisible Menace", she discussed tuberculosis, one of many unwanted and unavoidable consequences of living in overcrowded conditions with poor sanitation.[192] She introduced to her readers a family of eight. The eldest boy, fifteen-year old Lee Song, had taken ill and was diagnosed with the disease. Mother was worried and asked the clinic doctor, "What can she do?" Her options were despairingly limited. Hospitals were meant only for the seriously ill, and there was no guarantee of getting treatment in time. Lee Song would have to go back to the clinic for injections and other treatment. "How long would this treatment take?" It was difficult to say. It could take three months or two years. Much would depend on providing proper care, in the form of good nutrition, rest and isolated from the rest of the family. The former would be provided by the clinic, but Mother was concerned. How can she isolate Lee Song from the rest of the family living in a "three-square-yard" room in Chinatown?

> And the doctors have no answer to give her. No-one is more aware than they of Lee Song's need. They know that he will most probably infect those six other people sharing his room. They know, too, that in turn, those six others may pass the disease on to the family in the next cubicle, and that Lee Song is a menace to all the inhabitants of that crowded house. Inhabitants that number between 50 and 60.[193]

Lee Song was only one of many afflicted with the disease. Three-quarters of the population were packed into city, enduring overcrowded living conditions. The incidence of tuberculosis rose sharply "in crowded, ill-ventilated rooms. It flourishes on lack of wholesome food. It conquers weakened bodies".[194] Earlier, the authorities' attention was focused on the control and prevention of infectious diseases as well as reversing the ill-effect of malnutrition. The main causes of recorded deaths throughout the occupation had been malaria, beriberi, infantile convulsions (due to malnutrition), respiratory ailments, and water-

[191] *The Straits Times*, 11 November 1951, "Traders in Human Merchandise".
[192] *The Straits Times*, 2 December 1951, "An Invisible Menace".
[193] *The Straits Times*, 2 December 1951, "An Invisible Menace".
[194] *The Straits Times*, 2 December 1951, "An Invisible Menace".

borne diseases (such as typhoid and dysentery).[195] But by 1947, tuberculosis began to receive public attention.[196] The Medical Department admitted that:

> Tuberculosis did not receive anything like the public attention in this part of the world before the war that it does to-day although the position was serious enough. The expenditure in this direction will go over the million dollar mark during the coming year [1949] for the first time, while the beds available (404) have been steadily stepped up since the re-occupation to over five times the pre-war total with a steadily expanding clinic. A clear cut Tuberculosis Policy Scheme … was tabled in the Legislative Council during the year … A Government Tuberculosis Advisory Board has been formed to work along these lines with the Social Welfare Department and the Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association, and a further committee under the auspices of the Secretary for Social Welfare will control the expenditure offered to cover domiciliary aid.[197]

The detailed efforts taken to control and prevent tuberculosis are discussed more extensively elsewhere.[198] Briefly, the high incidence of the disease raised sufficient public consternation for some members of society to form the Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association (SATA) in 1947.[199] As noted in the above excerpt, plans were by 1948 in motion

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[195] *Annual Report / Medical Department for 1947* (Singapore: Government Printing Office), p. 21. [Hereafter abbreviated as MDAR]. In 1945, 6,055 deaths by malaria (and unspecified fever) were recorded, 6,683 from beriberi, 5,752 from bronchitis, pneumonia, and T.B. of respiratory system, 3,118 from infantile convulsions, and 2,811 from typhoid, dysentery, diarrhea, and enteritis. In 1946, the numbers for each category respectively were: 1,929, 786, 3,868, 1,751, and 908, demonstrating on paper at least control of the public health situation.

[196] A small war of words erupted between the government and members of the public (in particular medical practitioners and the press) aghast at the lack of action by the former. See for an overview of opinions and editorials, *The Straits Times*, 13 January 1947, "Govt. Attitude to TB 'Defeatist", *The Straits Times*, 18 January 1947, "Tuberculosis and Hypocrisy", *The Straits Times*, 18 July 1947, "It can and must be done". There was no mention of tuberculosis in the MDAR for 1946, and only a cursory mention in the MDAR for 1947, that pulmonary tuberculosis was receiving more attention from the public. The Medical Plan, the first version published in 1947, was not keen on expanding beyond the planned for 300 beds at Tan Tock Seng Hospital set aside for TB patients (an increase of 100), as "essential services" (such as increasing hospital accommodation and related infrastructure and personnel) needed to be tended to first. See Singapore Director of Medical Services. *The Medical Plan for Singapore* (Singapore: Printed at the Govt. Print. Off., 1948). (Command paper / Singapore. Legislative Council; cmd. 4 of 1948), pp. 3-4, and 9-10.

[197] MDAR for 1948, p. 5.

[198] See sections on tuberculosis in various MDARs, including sections on Tan Tock Seng Hospital, the designated hospital for TB patients. For a contemporaneous overview of treatment measures, see Lim Syn Neo, "Measures for the Treatment and Prevention of Tuberculosis in Singapore: A Description and Assessment with Special Reference to their Social Aspects" (Unpublished academic exercise – Dept. of Social Studies, University of Malaya, 1955).

[199] A brief overview of the organization's history can be found on its website: "Our History", http://www.sata.com.sg/about_us/our-history/. Accessed 9 December 2015. Information can also be found in commemorative publications, such as SATA CommHealth, *The SATA story: celebrating 65 years of caring for the community* (Singapore: SATA CommHealth, 2012), and Lim Kay Tong and Mary Lee, *Fighting TB: the SATA story (1947-1997)* (Singapore: Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association, 1997). See also Mirabelle Chang, "Shoulders to the Wheels: The Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association's Role in Combating the 'Second Brother' (1946–1958)" (Unpublished academic exercise – Dept. of History, National University of Singapore, 2014). For a personal account of the fight against tuberculosis, hear oral history of Gupta, N. C. Sen (Dr.). Medical Services in Singapore, Accession Number 002087. 6 Reels.

to treat and to arrest the spread of tuberculosis. As far as limited resources would permit, medical facilities were boosted to combat tuberculosis.[200] In addition, TB treatment allowances for recovering patients and their families were introduced by legislation and managed by the Social Welfare Department.[201] By 1951, the number of recorded deaths by tuberculosis was on the decline.[202] Still, the numbers infected and being treated for the disease were increasing. While this could have been due to more people being aware and seeking treatment, this in turn exposed gaps in existing approaches that treated the disease more as a clinical condition and less a social problem.[203] Tuberculosis was associated with poverty, which manifested primarily in overcrowded living conditions, poor sanitation, and few means to treat the disease. In her article, Hickley expanded on the plight of a homeless fifty-year old man, begging for a living, and walked miles to the SATA clinic for treatment. She contrasted his situation with that of a discharged criminal or a destitute person, observing that "if he was a discharged criminal he could apply for aid. If he were destitute Social Welfare would come forward to help him, but because he tubercular he has nowhere to go". He would be better served in a "T.B. colony", instead of living on the streets or in overcrowded conditions. They would receive better medical care and attention, segregated from the healthier sections of the population.

[200] Measures included the BCG immunization for children introduced in 1949, expanding the number of beds for TB patients in Tan Tock Seng Hospital, the establishment of a TB sanatorium for recovering TB patients, and increased funding for hospital treatment and treatment allowances. See for an overview, *The Straits Times*, 26 August 1948, "A Singapore Sanatorium"; *The Straits Times*, 5 October 1948, "Govt. To Spend $1 Million On TB in '49, Says Gimson"; *The Straits Times*, 9 January 1949, "Rest as We Pay TB Victim Plan"; *The Straits Times*, 30 April 1949, "Colony May Undertake B.C.G. Immunisation"; *The Straits Times*, 3 September 1949, "Million a Year to Fight T.B."; *The Straits Times*, 12 September 1949, $1,400,000 Plan to Extend Hospital"; *The Straits Times*, 12 November 1951, "$2 million a year war on TB is planned"; The Straits Times, 23 November 1951, "South Winds Hotel Plan".

[201] The T.B. Treatment Allowance scheme started in April 1949, and provided "relatively high rates of relief to persons suffering from tuberculosis who have a reasonable chance of recovery if they can obtain rest and good food. Persons receiving relief under this scheme are required to cease work during the period of treatment and payment of allowance". (SWDAR for 1951, p. 37). Financial relief was substantial to cover the loss of income. There were different rates paid to the head of household, the wife, and their dependents. Until the 1960s, additional assistance was also given for rent and living allowance. The average number of payments made per month went from 120 in 1949, to 2,644 in 1959, with a corresponding increase in expenditure annually from $100,468 to $$2,770,668. (SWDAR for 1959). This scheme was first mooted in public by Lim Yew Hock in 1948, then nominated Legislative Councilor, as part of an overall motion requesting government to look into social security measures for the Colony of Singapore. See *The Singapore Free Press*, 27 October 1948, "Councillor asks aid for T.B. Patients", and *The Straits Times*, 28 October 1948, T.B. Grants Suggested".

[202] Lim, "Measures", p. 5. (Table 5).

[203] See section on tuberculosis in various MDARs. For personal accounts of treating TB patients, hear oral histories of medical social workers in Tan Tock Seng Hospital in the 1950s. Chen Swee Soo (Mrs.). Medical Services in Singapore, Accession Number 002251. Interviewed in 2000. 7 Reels, and Cecilia M Nayar (Mrs). Medical Services in Singapore, Accession Number 002312. Interviewed in 2000. 7 Reels.

Moving on from juvenile crime, disease and human vice, Hickley then focused on the more personal (and violent) in her penultimate feature piece, "The Wicked Parents". Having established the physical living environment, the despair of poverty and large families, and the disease one could catch from overcrowded conditions, she delved deeper into the family and exposed unseen cruelty.

> A young boy clad in a piece of sacking sat on a dirty heap in the compound near his house. His shoulders were hunched, his eyes vacant, his whole bearing one of hopelessness and despair. He had not eaten for three days and his stomach was crying out for food. At last he got to his feet and walked stiffly over to the house. His body was a mass of purple bruises and septic wounds. He opened the door cautiously and peeped inside. The room was empty. He could hear footsteps in the kitchen. Quickly, he darted over to the table where a small pile of money lay. He gathered it up, and left the house as quietly as he had entered it. But he was not swift enough for the woman in the kitchen. As he limped down the steps she opened the door and rushed after him. His small body weakened by privation was no match for hers, and whimpering and begging for mercy the child was dragged into the house by his tormentor. Minutes later, neighbours heard the boy's agonised cries as he was beaten on the hands and nails with a heavy, iron-headed hammer. That night, the boy slept in the yard with a pillow of rags under his bruised and aching head, and a gunny sack covering his pitiful body. This is not a story of London in Dicken's day, nor the tale of a wretched African slave child. The locale is Singapore, the time, the present. It is one of many stories that the Social Welfare Officers hear, on the average of once a week. How many other incidents of cruelty occur that no-one ever discovers, we can only guess.[204]

Consulting case files from the Social Welfare Department, Hickley observed that the abused children were often either adopted or *mui tsai*.[205] At times, tragically, it was their own parents who were responsible for willful neglect and "ghastly actions" that included:

> [B]abies...found undernourished to the point of total blindness, and sometimes death. Older children are admitted to hospital with running wounds as the results frequent canings [sic], swollen fingers and horrifying contusions of the eye. There was one child whose body was smeared with honey and covered with ants, and another, whose parents gave full reign to their sadistic impulses by rubbing chillies [sic] over the tender flesh of their son.[206]

Such acts moreover did not always occur in conditions of wretched poverty, though desperate conditions might have contributed to unchecked frustrations on the part of parents and caregivers.

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[204] *The Straits Times*, 9 December 1951, "The Wicked Parents".
[205] Directly translated from the Cantonese as "little sister". As explained in Chapter 2 of this study, pp. 23-24.
[206] *The Straits Times*, 9 December 1951, "The Wicked Parents".

A Teeming Mass of Humanity

One fairly consistent underlying theme tying the above together were the large sizes of families that formed the teeming mass of humanity in postwar Singapore. In addition to the absence of urban planning and proper housing, large families also contributed to overcrowding and its ill consequences. 34% of surveyed households in the 1947 and 1953-4 social surveys were considered to be of medium-size and above (five or more persons).[207] In 1947, about 80% of surveyed medium- and large-sized households were living in overcrowded and acutely overcrowded conditions.[208] The 1953-4 survey showed a deterioration of housing conditions since 1947, with a general increase in room density particularly for large-sized households.[209] With natural increase, lowering death rates and substantial migration from Peninsular Malaya, Singapore's population increased an average of 4.5% annually between 1947 and 1957, with the crude birth rate reaching a high of forty-three per thousand individuals in 1957.[210] In 1961, the State of Singapore Development Plan identified the high population growth rate as the aggravating factor for much-needed social and economic development.[211] High population growth strained social services and other infrastructure required to support life. For instance, a nurse recalled:

> The number of deliveries in KKH [Kandang Kerbau Hospital] was at its peak, with an average of 100 deliveries per day. The number of beds available then fell far short of demand, and many deliveries were conducted with patients lying on the floor on mackintoshes or on transport trolleys. Patients in the early stages of labour sat for long hours on hard wooden benches waiting for a bed.[212]

In 1965, on average, a baby was delivered every eleven minutes in Singapore. The following year, in 1966, the maternity hospital at Kandang Kerbau entered the Guinness Book of World

[207] Goh, *Urban Incomes and Housing*, p. 46: Single-Person household, Small (2-4 persons); Medium (5-7); Large (8 and above).
[208] *Social Survey 1947*, p. 80, Table XXXII.
[209] Goh, *Urban Incomes and Housing*, p. 70.
[210] Saw Swee Hock, *The Population of Singapore* (Singapore: ISEAS Pub., 2012, 3rd ed.), pp. 14-15. See also Saw Swee Hock, "Population Growth and Control", in Ernest C. T. Chew and Edwin Lee, *A History of Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 223-224.
[211] Singapore Ministry of Finance, *State of Singapore development plan, 1961-1964* (Singapore: [s.n.], 1961).
[212] Paulin Koh, "History of Midwifery and O&G Nursing in Singapore" in Tan Kok Hian and Tay Eng Hseon (eds.), *The History of Obstetrics & Gynaecology in Singapore* (Singapore: ARMOUR Publishing Pte Ltd, 2003), p. 373. Quoted in "Family Planning – Archives Online", http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/article/family-planning. Accessed 10 December 2015.

Records for delivering 39,835 births - a record that stood for the next ten years. Measures to reverse population growth would only take hold in Singapore after 1970.[213]

Simply put, large families posed social problems, particularly for households with already limited means. Kathleen Hickley observed that Ah Meng might not have been given away if she was the second rather than the eighth child. Lee Song would also receive better care and recover faster if he need not squeeze in a small room with seven other persons.[214] The absence of one or both parents also exposed the children to various risks. A research study conducted in 1958-9 of twenty-six large families (having at least ten children) found that almost all of the Chinese families had given away at least one child to a relative or close friend. All the surveyed families had also lost at least one child to natural causes at various stages in their family history. There were also concerns about the mother's health, the physical and educational well-being of the children, and the ability provide for everyone in the family.[215] *The Straits Times* articles do not represent entirely the state of Singapore postwar society. What they offer instead are detailed, personal, and at times uncomfortable, glimpses into the living conditions and social needs of postwar Singapore, not only of the children but also of their families.

In doing so, they give a vivid idea of the scale of the task confronting the Social Welfare Department and the colonial policy of social welfare. The war and occupation had severely dislocated the lives of the individual and his or her family. Singapore society, during and immediately after the war, for all sense and purpose broke down to basic survival instincts. Access to food, medicine, jobs (and income) was limited. At the same time, incidences of crime and disease increased. The breakdown in social order exacerbated existing problems, such as the loss of adult breadwinners, overcrowding, poor public hygiene, and general poverty. It is little wonder then that social welfare activities during the occupation period and immediately after focused mainly on basic needs, such as food, individual medical care and public health, and measures to repair damage done to society, such as youth development and restarting schools. In addition, postwar Singapore was fundamentally different from before. The high population growth rates between 1947 and 1957 resulted mainly from natural increase rather than immigration. This trend indicated a

[213] Theresa Wong and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, "Fertility and the Family: An Overview of Pro-natalist Population Policies in Singapore". Asian Metacentre Research Paper Series, No. 12.
[214] *The Straits Times*, 16 December 1951, "This is One Answer to a Great Problem".
[215] Goh Siong Hwee, "Some Singapore mothers with large families: a study of some aspects of life of twenty six mothers who have recently given birth to their tenth or higher child in Kandang Kerbau Maternity Hospital, Singapore". (Unpublished academic exercise - Dept. of Social Studies, University of Malaya, 1959).

more settled society, in contrast to its transient counterpart Singapore's entrepôt economy encouraged before the Second World War. As the efforts of the British demonstrated, the dislocation of war and occupation made more urgent the redressing of social ills and problems. At the same time, an increasingly settled society exponentially increases responsibility for society's well-being, whether on the part of the state or society in general.

Anti-colonial nationalism and the accompanying complications of decolonization gave social welfare an additional edge. Aspiring nationalists seeking independence or at the very least self-determination, would need to demonstrate the ability – if not necessarily the compassion – to care and cater to the welfare of the people they sought to lead. The Social Welfare Department was regularly called upon to help victims of fires and floods that were commonplace in 1950s and 1960s Singapore. Such emergencies took on a sharper edge during periods of political change. Just as communist elements attempted to steal a march on the British Military Administration in the immediate aftermath of the Japanese surrender, rival political parties and organizations saw value in taking a keen interest in the welfare of the people they sought to lead into a post-colonial future and beyond.[216]

The Potential of a Social Welfare State

Social welfare by the state, as conceptualized and developed in late colonial Singapore, was political as well as social. The former directly influenced its scope and meaning. For the colonial government and its supporters (and successors), social welfare was a useful arrow to have in the quiver, either to win the "hearts and minds" of the people in the fight against the Malayan Communist Party and its elements, or as a relief valve for pent-up frustration and dissatisfaction with authority, or both. Over the long run however, it was the everyday mundane social needs that remained the primary cause of personal hardship. This kept the core functions of the Social Welfare Department relevant through different periods in Singapore's history. The Social Welfare Department continued well into the post-colonial period. It operated as a distinct agency within various ministries from 1955 until 1979,

[216] One of David Marshall's first acts as Chief Minister was to institute a Meet the People Session, where people could see him personally to seek assistance. Groups affiliated with the Communists organized relief efforts for victims of floods and fires See Lee Ting Hui, *The Open United Front: The Communist Struggle in Singapore 1954-1966* (Singapore: South Seas Society, 1996), pp. 53-54. See also He Jin, *Ju Lang* [*The Mighty Wave*], a fictional novel based on the activities of such groups during the 1950s. Goh Sin Tub, the Deputy Director for Social Welfare in 1961, similarly recalled rival political organizations competing to provide aid to victims of the Bukit Ho Swee fire. See NAS OHC, Goh Sin Tub. The Public Service – A Retrospection. Interviewed in 1993. Reel 6 (of 7).

surviving along the way the formation of and then separation from Malaysia in 1963 and 1965 respectively.[217] Even when after the Social Welfare Department ceased operations after 1979, its core functions were absorbed into a new Ministry of Community Development in the early 1980s. They still exist in updated forms in present-day Singapore, residing in the Ministry of Social and Family Development since 2012.

Historically, the Social Welfare Department was one symbol of a colonial government acknowledging colonial society as its own and assuming the responsibilities for some aspects of its well-being. For colonial society in Singapore, which had been more familiar with family and community support rather extensive state social services, the Social Welfare Department was an additional, and relatively more stable, source of help. It reflected a new type of colonial state, one with the broader objective of uniting the divergent interests and loyalties of a plural society. Social welfare by the state altered the perception of transience in a mere location to the permanence of a possible home. In doing so, it affected the lives of a broad spectrum of individuals as basic social needs remained relatively constant, though punctuated by emergencies that in turn aggravated the urgency of such needs. The Social Welfare Department helped many an individual and his or her family during such times. Gomez, Frois, Subramaniam, Ah Meng, Kow Tow, Soon Hock and countless others came into contact with the various structures of a nascent social welfare state as represented by the Social Welfare Department.

There was much value, political and social, in providing, or at least appearing to provide social welfare. For instance, Subramaniam felt a sense of gratitude for the earlier help given to him and his family. In 1970, he joined the Ministry of Social Affairs. His innate sense of gratitude led to a forty-year career in the Social Welfare Department, beginning in the Children and Young Persons Section. He "wanted to give back to society what I gained from it … I was thankful that I was given an opportunity to pay back".[218] This personal statement exemplifies the raw potential of social welfare to build and buttress a cohesive community via positive relationships between individuals and their government.

[217] After the Ministry of Labour and Welfare (1955-1959), the department was part of the Ministry of Labour and Law, Ministry of Labour, and finally the Ministry of Social Affairs.
[218] NAS OHC, M. Subramaniam, reel 2.

CHAPTER 5. REALIZING THE SOCIAL WELFARE STATE

This chapter discusses the impact of an official state presence in social welfare in Singapore. It highlights and examines the needs of an effective social welfare policy, specifically training programs to do social welfare work and forming community partnerships, and from there, the varied outcomes from its implementation. The implementation of social welfare was uneven. This meant social welfare policy did not happen simply because it was so ordered. There were many variables, anticipated and unanticipated, to navigate, negotiate, and to resolve. How they were eventually resolved shaped the social welfare state in late colonial Singapore and thereafter.

Knowledge and Expertise: Professional Social Work

Before the Social Welfare Department, the closest Singapore had to social work was the work done by the Protectors of Chinese, officers from the Labour Department (dealing with Indian laborers), and District Officers providing assistance on a personal basis. Outside of government, the Salvation Army was perhaps the only organization which had adopted an organized, holistic approach to social issues before the war. Even then, the "soldiers" of the Salvation Army were not professional social workers. Tan Beng Neo for instance first learned midwifery as a skill, and the rest on the job, such as institutional care and managing juveniles.

Hence, the relevant knowledge and expertise were absent and needed to carry out social welfare work. The Social Welfare Department took seriously the training of social welfare officers from its inception. One of its first public announcements made was a call for applications for three scholarships via the Colonial Development and Welfare fund.[1] In 1946, three locals, including one already working in the Social Welfare Department, were sent the United Kingdom, followed by another three in 1948.[2] Others periodically follow in subsequent years as and when other scholarships were available, and when the Department could afford to let them go. Most of the officers sent graduated from the prewar Raffles

[1] *The Straits Times*, 17 June 1946, "Training in Welfare Work". The ad was one of the earliest announcements of the existence of a new social welfare department.

[2] The first batch of students included Tan Kay Hai, a former RAF reconnaissance pilot and POW after being shot down flying over Normandy in 1944, Seah Yun Khong, and Nellie Chen. In the following years, the Social Welfare Department, via various scholarships, sponsored the studies of Carl de Souza (1947), Kismet Fung (1949), Goh Keng Swee (1948), Monie Sundram (1948), Woon Wah Siang, and Tan Beng Neo, amongst others.

College, or had a basic degree or certificate. So depending on their individual qualifications and/or work experience, they were either studying for an honors degree or a postgraduate diploma. Students sent by the Social Welfare Department usually attended a two-year diploma course, Colonial Social Science and Administration, at the London School of Economics and Political Science. One of the first to be sent overseas was Carl de Souza, a former prisoner-of-war who survived working on the Burma-Siam "death railway". Interviewed after he returned, de Souza outlined the course:

> The course covered colonial administration, social administration, sociology, psychology and economics. The section on social administration included a study of the history of British social security from the Poor Laws to the present "cradle to the grave" system….[3]

Their two years in Britain were not all theory, and also included study trips and attachments to relevant social welfare institutions, such as Approved Schools, Borstal institutions, probation courses etc.[4] Certain individuals did full degree courses, like Goh Keng Swee in economics and statistics, and Monie Sundram in law. There was a discernible emphasis on achieving a good academic record as well as a basic foundation of relevant field experience.

Sending two or three at a time every year, meant taking away (two years at a time) valuable human resource from a fledgling Social Welfare Department dealing with a broad range of tasks and responsibilities. Goh Keng Swee and Monie Sundram for instance could have gone to London a year earlier, but were held back because of their participation in the 1947 social survey. The Social Welfare Department did make an early attempt to organize some form of local training. For six weeks from October to December 1947, it organized a "Departmental Training School" hosted in the Juvenile Court room. The "School" was less a training program for potential social workers and more a series of lectures to introduce the new social welfare department. The lectures covered a general introduction of the Social Welfare Department and its various sections, and key social functions and issues, such as the protection of women and girls, juvenile delinquency and treatment, social research, child feeding, social assistance and insurance, and destitution.[5]

Rather, at that early stage of the Social Welfare Department, the "School" served primarily as a broad introduction of the Department and its various sections to the audience,

[3] *The Straits Times*, 6 May 1951, "A young man who is going places". Article was a write-up on de Souza and his time in the Social Welfare Department since its inception in 1946.
[4] *The Straits Times*, 28 August 1947, "Malaya Students Visit Continent".
[5] *The Second Report*, Appendix K.

usually made up of officials from other branches of government, members from voluntary organizations, and the general public. Department staff presented their work in, supposedly, five to ten minute talks, and questions and discussion were encouraged. One objective was "to oblige heads of sections to take critical stock of themselves", and to "acquaint [themselves] with work ... going on outside their own sections".[6] After 1947, specific "training" courses were arranged periodically, such as for probation.[7]

Almoner Training

The Medical Department was the first to bring professional social work to Singapore, beating the Social Welfare Department to that distinction. The ten-year medical plan called for the creation of an Almoner's Department (within the Medical Department), so as to "look after the social, economic and health problems of needy hospital patients and dependents".[8] The almoner, literally a person who gives alms, was the antecedent of the professional social worker in Singapore. He or she (predominantly the latter) was a key point of contact in the hospital setting for social problems related to health matters.

In 1948, Nora Tanburn arrived in Singapore to survey and to report on the prospects for an Almoner's Department. She was a trained and experienced social worker, with a social studies diploma from the University of London, and worked for twelve years in a London hospital.[9] The following year in 1949, Kathleen Joy "Mollie" Eastaugh arrived in Singapore to take up the position of almoner in the Singapore General Hospital. Other almoners from Britain soon followed, taking up almoner positions in the other hospitals, such as Tan Tock Seng, Kandang Kerbau, and Trafalgar House (not a hospital as such, but a home for leprosy patients). By 1953, there were at least five almoners working in the Singapore hospitals, overseeing a team of student almoners, investigators and clerks.

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[6] *The Second Report*, Appendix K.
[7] *The Singapore Free Press*, 18 August 1951, "Welfare Dept. exam results".
[8] *The Straits Times*, 28 May 1948, "The Minimum: $50,000,000". The initial Medical Plan only hinted at an almoner's department, primarily in the area of providing a "social service" to the very poor in Singapore society. I was acknowledged that social services, without further elucidation, had been available in the "field of venereal, of mental and infectious disease, and perhaps in infant welfare work". (MDAR for 1946, pp. 49-50). An almoner's department was mentioned for the first time in 1948 as part of a set of modifications to the original medical plan. "An Almoners Department is now looked upon as an integral part of any hospital: it investigates the economic standing of the patients who enter it and "follows up" the cases needing its assistance after they leave". (MDAR for 1947, p. 78).
[9] *The Straits Times*, 28 May 1948, "Almoner's Dept. For Singapore".

Sometime in 1949 or 1950, just before she graduated with a degree from the new University of Malaya, Daisy Vaithilingam listened to a talk given by Kathleen Eastaugh on medical social work. Twenty-five-year-old Daisy was "very fascinated" by the description given, and made a second appointment with the almoner to discuss a possible after-graduation job. In 1950, she officially joined as a "student almoner" at the General Hospital, working under the senior almoner. At that time, local training for potential almoners was done in-house, on the job, and in between daily tasks – at times, riding on training for medical students. Daisy recalled the training regime:

> I used to go with the medical students on their visits to places like the sewerage system and their field visits. One of the things they had to learn to do was how to build lavatories. Actually dig a hole and make it so that they could help some rural people. You also had to learn how to make wells so that they could get water. None of the medical students now have to do that. Then I attended a course in psychology run by the naval unit. So I had one lecturer to myself and he was the psychologist. And I went to one of the senior lawyers to do law lectures. And then I did my actual field work in the hospital.[10]

Daisy also remembered one of the first tasks she had was to solicit donations for walking aids, and how surprised she was at the easy generosity of strangers.

> One of the first thing I did was to write to people just using the telephone book. To write to people to ask them to help out patients who needed orthopedic appliances. That means, like crutches or calipers. Some appliances to help them to learn to walk. Many of them were people who had been affected by polio.... Every time I opened a letter there would be a check. People we didn't know. We just looked through the telephone book, [wrote] to companies and said that we had a child, can you help with so much. That was the first time I saw how generous the people in Singapore were, because we would always get checks to help the children.[11]

By 1951, almoner training had become more formalized.[12] A call for prospective student almoners was advertised, calling for applications to a fifteen-month training course beginning later in October. The course would include "lectures and theoretical work on social medicine, administrative law and psychology; studying social significances and backgrounds of illnesses and the implications of different diseases on individuals, families and

[10] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, Women Through the Years: Economic & Family Lives. Accession Number 000621. Interviewed in 1993. Reel 2 (of 17). (Reels 12 to 17 embargoed). She passed away in 2011, and in 2014 was inducted in the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame.
[11] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, reel 2.
[12] *The Singapore Free Press*, 11 May 1951, "S'pore short of almoners, too".

communities living in the city and rural areas". Applicants moreover had to fulfill specific prerequisites, such as Economics, and possess a university degree or a diploma from the old Raffles College.[13] This particular advertisement noted that it would be the second such course to be held and there were four vacancies. The first one was held the year before in 1950, and had only one student almoner, most probably Daisy Vaithilingam. In 1952, Daisy was sent to England for further studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science and the Institute of Almoners. By the time she returned to Singapore sometime in 1954, the colony was also welcoming its first batch of graduates from the University of Malaya, purposefully educated and trained for social work.

Social Studies Diploma

Social work, as a subject taught in the university, was first proposed in the 1948 Carr-Saunders Commission Report on university education in Malaya.[14] In identifying subjects that could produce and support vocations useful for self-government, the Commission thought from social work could "come many vocations, including industrial welfare, labour management, probation work, hospital social service, club management, youth leadership…."[15] At that time, the prewar Raffles College and the King Edward VII College of Medicine was in the midst of becoming the University of Malaya, which was eventually established in Singapore in 1949. The Commission recommended a certificate course in social work for the new university, "under the auspices of the department of economics", modeled on similar courses offered in Britain. Such courses, usually called "social studies" or "social science", covered a range of topics that might include "elementary economics, social and economic history, social philosophy … a study of social structure and social legislation; social psychology and … elementary statistics".[16] The Commission also placed a premium on understanding local social and economic conditions, observing that the course should be practical as well as theoretical.

[13] *The Singapore Free Press*, 11 May 1951, "S'pore short of almoners, too". Other details include a $225 monthly salary, that could be increased to $300 or $400 on completion of course and appointment to almoner.
[14] Commission on University Education in Malaya (Great Britain), *Report of the Commission on University Education in Malaya* / [chairman, Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders] (Kuala Lumpur: Govt. Press, 1948), pp. 32-33. Hereafter *Carr-Saunders Commission Report*. See also *The Straits Times*, 1 May 1948, "University at Johore Bahru: Carr-Saunders Commission Issues Report".
[15] *Carr-Saunders Commission Report*, p. 33. The other subjects were Public Administration, Industry and Commerce, Accountancy, Education, Law, Architecture, Engineering, Agriculture, and Veterinary Science, Forestry and Fisheries.
[16] *Carr-Saunders Commission Report*, p. 33.

For various reasons, a social work department or program did not materialize until 1952. Thomas Silcock, then head of the Economics Department, and for a time Dean and Acting Vice-Chancellor, felt the delay was due to his assuming the latter positions during the initial stages of transition. Any attempt to implement the recommendations during that particular period would have further antagonized academics whose feathers were already ruffled. Briefly, a key recommendation by the Commission envisioned a substantial expansion of the Economics Department in the name of allied social sciences, which would in turn have the outcome of a more influential Economics Department (at the expense of the Arts).[17] This provoked resistance to what was perceived as the wholesale adoption of the London School of Economics model.[18] There was good reason to follow that model, as the school from 1943 was running a "special course in colonial social studies leading to a colonial social policy".[19]

Things were put into motion only when Silcock reverted to head of the Economics Department. He made a tour of relevant universities and courses in England, Scotland and Wales, and convened a search for a suitable program convener.[20] They found Jean Robertson (1908-1974), a strong-willed Scot with extensive experience in both government and academia.[21] Educated in Scotland (with a Master in Arts and then a Diploma in Social Studies), she worked and taught in England and Australia, (holding the post of Chief Woman Officer in the former National Council of Social Service), before heading on to New Zealand in 1949 to take up a position in a new School of Social Science in the old University of New Zealand. Arriving in Singapore in 1952, one of Robertson's first acts was to change the course accreditation from a certificate to a diploma. She met resistance initially as there were concerns a diploma would be seen as the equivalent of an honors degree, hence pricing the social studies graduate out of the market with expected higher salaries. A compromise was reached by presenting the diploma as a "post-graduate qualification" following a basic pass degree or its equivalent. This allowed for more mature students – who have had their

[17] *Carr-Saunders Commission Report*, pp. 46-47.
[18] Thomas Silcock, *A History of Economics Teaching and Graduates in Singapore, Department of Economics and Statistics* (National University of Singapore, 1985), p. 139. See also NAS OHC, Thomas Silcock, Education in Singapore (Part 1: English). Accession Number 000180. Reel 17 (of 19).
[19] *Carr-Saunders Commission Report*, p. 33.
[20] Silcock, *A History of Economics Teaching*, pp. 114 and 138.
[21] Her arrival and the pending inauguration of the social studies course was announced to the Social Welfare Council in December 1951. NAS, SCA 12/51, 14 December 1951. The Social Welfare Department was anticipating the new course with relish, as it would increase "the flow of trained social workers into Government service, industry and unofficial welfare organisations". It also anticipated that all senior officers in the Department would hold the Diploma or its equivalent. See SWDAR 1951, p. 3.

education interrupted by the war or had a basic level of education – to join if they had a minimum of five years of practical experience and was not less than twenty-four years of age (the usual age a student then would take an honors degree).[22]

Advertisements calling for applications to the new diploma course started appearing in March 1952, for classes beginning in October the same year.[23] Silcock and Robertson also personally appealed to the voluntary organizations represented on the Social Welfare Council to send potential students.[24] The course was full-time and took two years. It required students to take classes, a minimum of twenty weeks (ten weeks each year) of practical work through attachments with relevant social service agencies, and to conduct individual field research and complete a 20,000-word research paper.[25] The entry requirements for the non-graduate, mature student included a special exam, a compulsory oral examination in colloquial Malay, and an interview.[26] The first hires included Beryl Wright, seconded from Australia for a year to teach psychology, and two part-time lecturers, Ahmad Ibrahim and Ann Elizabeth Wee.[27] Ahmad Ibrahim was a lawyer in government service, and became independent Singapore's first Attorney-General. Described by Silcock as an "English anthropologist", Ann Wee arrived in Singapore from England in May 1950. She majored in Economics and Sociology at the London School of Economics, and studied anthropology under Raymond Firth as a graduate student.[28]

The first batch of diploma students included the first locally trained almoners (Cecilia Nayar and Chen Swee Soo), a future Permanent Secretary and Ambassador (Chia Cheong Fook), and a future President of the Republic of Singapore (S. R. Nathan). In 1952, Nathan was a "mature" twenty-eight-year-old trade unionist working for the Johore state government. He was accepted into the course with a bursary from Shell Company. Chia Cheong Fook was a year younger than Nathan, and had been working in the Social Welfare Department as an assessor or investigator for the relief section. Chia had topped the Departmental Training

[22] Jean Robertson, "Social Work Education in Singapore and Malaysia", in Peter Hodge (ed.), *Community Problems and Social Work in Southeast Asia: The Hong Kong and Singapore Experience* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1980), p. 77. See also Silcock, *A History of Economics Teaching*, pp. 140-141.
[23] *The Straits Times*, 20 March 1952, "New Varsity Course for Welfare Workers".
[24] *The Singapore Free Press*, 21 March 1952, "Dean Wants Support for Social Studies".
[25] NAS, SCA 190/52.
[26] A wide command of local languages was considered advantageous. Those included Cantonese, Hokkien, Kuoyu (Mandarin Chinese), Teochew, Hindi, Tamil, Telegu. The entrance exam had three parts: a General paper, an English paper, and a Social Studies paper (covering "recent public affairs in Malaya especially those of social significance, such as education, public health, social welfare, labour and trade unions, the emergency, constitutional developments, public revenue and expenditure and rural development". NAS, SCA 190/52.
[27] As recalled by Silcock in *A History of Economics Teaching*, p. 141.
[28] NAS OHC, Ann Wee. Reel 2 (of 8).

Course the year before. Nathan and Chia were examples of the mid-career individuals with relevant work experience the course targeted.

At the other end of the scale were the fresh graduates from a basic degree course, like Cecilia Nayar. In 1952, Cecilia was a twenty-two-year-old who decided, after meeting Eastaugh on the advice on her doctor-brother, to switch her academic interest from education to social work. She, along with another student almoner, were awarded scholarships by the Medical Department to pursue their studies.[29] By then, the fifteen-month almoner training course had been combined with the diploma course. This meant, as she recalls, an extremely packed two-year schedule of classes, lectures, and practical work.[30] Even throughout the long vacation periods, she remembers having to attend "a lot of" lectures and doing "extra placements" at various hospitals. Much like Daisy Vaithilingam had done earlier, but now with the coursework and practical attachments as required by the course. While comfortable with the academic and theoretical portions of the course, Cecilia was less at ease with the practical aspects. "I was as lost … lost at sea. I had no clue how to go about anything. Yes there were the clients, but what to do about their problems".[31] A self-described natural introvert, she found it difficult to speak freely in social situations, resulting in amusing moments during her field attachments. One such incident happened when she was attached to the Women and Girls Section of the Social Welfare Department. Much of the placement involved mere observation, but even that mortified Cecilia as she was taken aback by the range of social and personal problems a young girl could have, some of which she never heard of before. After a period of observation, her supervisor, Carl de Souza, asked her to interview a young couple who was brought in after an anti-vice raid.

> I didn't know… I was petrified. I thought to myself, "My god, what am I going to say? Where do I begin?" So he left me, with this young couple, young girl and boy you know…. And I sat there … I just didn't know what to say. So I gave an excuse, I said "excuse me a while", and I went across [to an experienced investigator who had taken her under her wing]. So I went up to her, "Pauline, what do I say?" She looked at me, as if to say, "I don't believe this" … "Ask them if they have slept together". So I never heard of the phrase [before], I don't know all these things… So I just asked them the question. And from there it took off….[32]

[29] Her colleague was Mrs. Chen Swee Soo, who also recorded an oral history with NAS OHC. See Chen Swee Soo (Mrs.). Medical Services in Singapore, Accession Number 002251. Interviewed in 2000. 7 Reels.
[30] NAS OHC, Cecilia M. Nayar (Mrs) (nee Lopez). Medical Services in Singapore, Accession Number 002312. Interviewed in 2000. Reel 2 (of 7).
[31] NAS OHC, Cecilia Nayar, reel 2.
[32] NAS OHC, Cecilia Nayar, reel 2.

Fresh graduates had similar experiences in following cohorts. Thung Syn Neo, from the second batch of diploma students, recalls a particularly unsettling moment for one of her classmates during a hospital visit:

> Well, I know that one of my classmates … just went to visit kids in the orthopedic hospital.... And she really felt quite sick just seeing these kids you know. At that time there was a lot of T. B. and post-polio cases, and to see these children stretched out on these frames made her rather sick, and so she gave up after that…. It is rather a bit of a shock…. I think perhaps … [we] were not exposed to all this, and so when we first see children like that, it does tug at your heart strings I think.

For the more outgoing student, like Syn Neo, such moments spurred them "to want to do it more than ever, because we feel that you have something to perhaps … make things a bit better for people or children…."[33] Driven by a similar sense of social justice, Janet Yee took no-pay leave from her duties as an assistant youth officer at the Social Welfare Department to attend the diploma course in 1957.[34] She remembers the diploma course and her teachers fondly, and thought the curriculum "very balanced and focused". Janet did her practical placements in Singapore with the Singapore Children Society and the Family Planning Association, and in Kuala Lumpur with the Social Welfare Department and the General Hospital. Each student had to complete at least ten weeks of practical placements per year. In those early years, voluntary organizations provided a much-needed avenue for practical experience. The Singapore Children's Society for instance was the first voluntary organization to create a dedicated casework agency. Its establishment dovetailed nicely with the commencement of the diploma course in 1952, developing what Jean Robertson called a "symbiotic relationship" as both "grew up" together. The cases the society handled were a fertile training ground for students to gain practical experience in managing the multifaceted problems of a family. Jean Robertson stated the benefits factually:

> The Society provided the laboratory where many experiments took place: In the use of the group; extension of individual relationship in diagnosis and treatment; in work with severely disturbed children; with their families;

[33] NAS OHC, Thung Syn Neo. Social Sector. Accession Number 003270. Interviewed in 2008. Reel 3 (of 10). Syn Neo remembers a similar experience when one of her students fainting while on hospital rounds, but managed to carry on and finished the course.

[34] NAS OHC, Janet Yee Keng Luan. Social Sector, Accession Number 003251. Interviewed in 2007. Reels 2 and 3 (of 9). She was initially successful in her application for an almoner's scholarship to attend the course. But the scholarship was withdrawn on account of her marriage.

> underachievers; as a base for the study of children at school; as an opportunity to reach out to parents through play of the children....[35]

Rendered more personally:

> Let us take as an example a typical family whose father or mother might well come to the Society for help: the father is unemployed; the mother has had a pregnancy nearly every year of her marriage and her health is seriously impaired as a result; the home is an overcrowded, insanitary, airless cubicle; the younger of the six children are undernourished and anaemic; the adolescent ones have left school at a low grade and have failed hopelessly to find jobs and so are rapidly becoming delinquents; one child of ten was not registered for school at the right age and has therefore missed his chance of free entry and there is no money for fees; what little money there is in the household is ill-spent as far as diet is concerned on foods which are filling but of little nutritive value..... The list is endless, but it is easy to see that a case of this nature concerning in the first place an under-nourished child or a problem child is in fact six cases all rolled into one.[36]

From the above example, one can discern medical needs for mother and child, employment assistance for the father, support for the children's education, possible probation for delinquent behavior, and perhaps a need to guide the adults in managing their household expenses and family needs. There was not only the "social work" aspect to resolve, but also the need to be aware of the legal and social structures those problems would come into contact with, such as legislation regarding juvenile crime, employment assistance and relief from the Labour and Social Welfare Departments, medical care from the hospitals, and support from schools.

Janet Yee's practical placement exposed her to family dynamics, in particular the position of the woman, and then the impetus to research family disputes.[37] She noted that most disputes stemmed from issues concerning money, in-laws, and spousal abuse. She commented that "last time the woman got no option, as they were for the most part economically dependent on men. Hence, she knew of women who felt they had no choice but to return to their husbands, even if the latter had been physical abusive or worse:

> Sometimes they bring prostitute to the house. Some of them was too much, and ask the wife to get out of the room to use. That one I really encourage her

[35] Jean Robertson, "Social Work Education", pp. 75-76.
[36] NAS, PRO (Public Relations Office) 46/55. The Children's Society's Sixth Annual Report 1957. The Society's private records (such as meeting minutes and annual reports) are available at the National Archives of Singapore.
[37] Janet Yee Keng-luan, "Disputes among Singapore Chinese families" (Unpublished academic exercise - Dept. of Social Studies, University of Malaya, 1959).

> [to leave]. In the end she made good. She went and find job as a cashier. She would cry, worry about her daughters. Eventually, when she on her own, eventually the daughters went looking for her. So you don't have to subject yourself to the humiliation and punishment and get beaten, when you [have] economic independence.[38]

The diploma course structure attempted to weld theory to the practical. For those who had prior experience, the former helped made sense of the latter. Chia Cheong Fook for instance found familiar the practical application of casework principles in relation to his work as a relief investigator:

> Basically, we learned about the principles of casework, that is – how do we deal with individuals, what sort of attitudes we should take towards them and how we should win their confidence so that they will be telling us some truths rather than try to shield away, thinking that if you don't give them the right answers, they will not get the assistance they want. So how to win their confidence and then elicit as much genuine information from them, without being threatening also at the same time…. For instance, in Public Assistance, if a person applied for monetary assistance, how do you go about it….[39]

S. R. Nathan initially could not see the relevance of learning economic and social histories that were centered on British and European experiences. But later, in the context of Singapore's attempts to industrialize and labor issues, he understood how:

> [P]roblems of poverty, injustice and cruelty in British society led to important social reforms, including the Beveridge Report of late 1941, which attempted to address some of the effects of large-scale unemployment and other social ills, and laid the foundations of the modern welfare state. Learning about the Industrial Revolution and its consequences gave me a better understanding of militant trade unions and the causes for which they agitated.[40]

Jean Robertson led the way during the early years, teaching the class on social casework. The class anchored a course structure that asked the student to understand the myriad aspects of society by studying relevant aspects of economics, statistics, psychology, philosophy, history, geography, law, and medicine. Cecilia Nayar recalls:

> Social casework is actually the process … in fact, that's our tool we use in helping patients…. We deal with patients on an individual basis. We deal with their problems by making an analysis of their background, the personality – that's where the psychology comes in, their background in the sense of their

[38] NAS OHC, Janet Yee, reel 2
[39] NAS OHC, Chia Cheong Fook, reel 2.
[40] S.R. Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey: Path to the Presidency* / with Timothy Auger (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, c2011), p. 147.

> relationship with their family, their home, their school, or the workplace, their employment place…. So it is a process by which … which includes things like interviewing techniques, and then you are able to find out their problems, and then assist them on a one-to-one basis. So that is roughly [social casework].[41]

She also remembers fairly vividly the utility of understanding developmental and behavioral psychology, as taught by Beryl Wright in the first year of the diploma course:

> Developmental psychology…, that means the development of the human being from birth, you know from the child as they developed, the toddler and so on, so as the child develops, then behavioral psychology. Because we have to understand people. And you will be dealing actually…. You see, the thing about social work of course you deal with people of all ages from birth to death. So we have to understand the psychology … of the people at these various points in time: the youth, the teenagers, the children, the middle-aged, the adults ... and so on…. [E]ssentially we had to understand the psychology of people … human development, at these various periods…. We can't handle people's problems without understanding [behavioral patterns] ….[42]

Those behavioral patterns were placed in the theoretical context and in real-life. The theory was provided by classes in law, which covered the "set-up of the legal system" in Singapore and its relation to social issues, classes in ethics and philosophy, which introduced discussions of morality, and in social medicine, which focused on human physiology, various kind of illnesses, and their impact on the individual and families.[43] The diploma program employed trained sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists – all of which preceded actual university departments in sociology, psychology, and even law.[44] The diploma course also covered economics, including elementary economics, labor economics (possibly as part of a

[41] NAS OHC, Cecilia Nayar, reel 2.
[42] NAS OHC, Cecilia Nayar, reel 2.
[43] Two notable figures from the teaching staff were Ahmad Ibrahim (b. 1916) and Dr. Ivan Polunin (b. 1920). The former taught law. He was a Queens Scholar, a former Municipal Commissioner, and taught at the University of Malaya since its inception, becoming Dean of the Law Faculty in 1972 (in Malaysia). He was also Singapore's first State Advocate-General in 1959 and later first non-British Attorney-General in 1966, and a former Ambassador. (His brother, Cal Bellini, was an actor who appeared in American-produced TV shows and films). Polunin, a medical doctor, taught at the university's Department of Social Medicine and Public Health. He also "moonlighted" as an ethnographer and documentary cinematographer. He amassed a substantial collection of imagery and film footage (in color) of 1950s and 1960s Singapore, its environment, flora and fauna, as well as social life. Most of this collection has been archived at the National Library of Singapore and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) Library – the latter including his lecture notes. Other lecturers included A. F. Wells, the first full-time hire after Jean Robertson. An English sociologist who had worked with William Beveridge on aspects of the British welfare state, Wells had research experience in the West Indies and was part of the resettlement process in Malaya during the Communist insurgency.
[44] A Department of Sociology was created in 1966 and another for Psychology in 2006. (The latter had been a distinct program within the Department of Social Work and Psychology in 1986). A Department of Law was established in 1956, and became a Faculty in 1959.

class on social history and policy), and rural poverty in Malaya.[45] The composition of the lecturers changed over time, but the core structures remained. For instance, after Beryl Wright left, psychology classes were taught by a group of part-timers drawn from the expatriate community.[46] Cecilia Nayar graduated from the diploma course with the distinct impression that she was learning about life in general as well as its various aspects.[47] Essentially, the program was a *bona fide* interdisciplinary social science course, testing students' abilities to adapt to knowledge ranging from the technicalities of compiling reliable statistics, to philosophical discussions on ethics, to comprehending Singapore and Malaya's social and constitutional structures, and finally, to apply them in practice. In 1956, the program became a full-fledged university department, and in the following year, the course was extended another year to meet the training requirements of the almoner.[48]

The presence of the diploma program in 1952, and its subsequent development into a university department, reflected the needs of a Singapore and Malaya that was anticipated to be at least self-governing. The early graduates all went on to work in various parts of government and society. Chia Cheong Fook and Janet Yee for instance returned to the Social Welfare Department after graduation. Cecilia Nayar, Thung Syn Neo and other newly-qualified almoners took up positions in the hospitals to assist with the pressing needs of patients and their families. Other graduates joined voluntary organizations full-time, such as Singapore Children's Society which created a bursary scheme for potential students. S. R. Nathan graduated with a distinction to go along with the diploma. He began work as an almoner in 1955 (possibly the first male almoner). In 1956, he was appointed the first local Seaman's Welfare Officer, at the personal request of the Labour Front government.[49] Nathan went on to be a key figure in the governments formed by the People's Action Party after

[45] Information on economic lecturers taken and summarized from Nathan, *An Unexpected Journey*, and Cecilia Nayar's oral interviews (Reels 2 and 3). See also K. V. Veloo, *Life and Times of a Social Worker: A Personal Memoir* (Singapore: Wee Kim Wee Centre, Singapore Management University; Singapore Indian Association, 2014), pp. 76-81 (for recollections of various lecturers), and 84-95 (for his practicum experiences).
[46] Sudha Nair (ed.), *Ebb and flow: 60 years of social work education in Singapore* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2012), p. 15.
[47] NAS OHC, Cecilia Nayar, reels 2 and 3.
[48] The additional year became known as the Diploma in Social Studies Part II, and the general course for the first two years, Diploma in Social Studies Part I – an unfortunate nomenclature that gave the impression of incompleteness. See Nair (ed.), *Ebb and Flow*, pp. 16-17. Hear also oral history of Jean Mary Marshall, who joined the university in 1957 to help with Part II of the course. NAS OHC, Jean Mary Marshall. Women Through the Years: Economic & Family Lives. Accession Number 001622. Interviewed in 1995. Reel 3 (of 9).
[49] His time as a seaman welfare officer is narrated in S. R. Nathan, *Why Am I Here? Overcoming Hardships of Local Seafarers* / [edited by Bernard T.G. Tan & Wee Seo Lay] (Singapore: Centre for Maritime Studies, National University of Singapore, c2010).

1959, all the while maintaining a close connection to his social work roots.[50] The work of the diploma graduates was significant in the context of decolonization. As social welfare officers and social workers, they continued the intimate engagement with the myriad social needs and dimensions of Singapore society inculcated during the diploma program. In doing so, they facilitated an emerging sense of community in Singapore and laid the foundations of professional social work in Singapore, ensuring its continued relevance in post-colonial Singapore. The almoners had earlier organized themselves into a Malayan Association of Almoners in 1954, which became the Singapore Association of Medical Social Workers - one of the many consequences of the political separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965. Encouraged by Jean Robertson, diploma graduates formed the School of Social Studies Association in 1956, which then became the Association of Professional Social Workers in 1960. In 1971, professional social work was brought under one banner, the Singapore Association of Social Workers, which continues in the present-day as the representative and regulating body for social workers in Singapore.

In 1966, the Department of Social Studies became the Department of Social Work and Social Administration, a nomenclature that acknowledged more directly the LSE influence on local developments of professional social work.[51] In addition, an undergraduate degree course was offered for the first time.[52] In 1967, Jean Robertson departed to take up a Professorship in the University of Hong Kong.[53] She was succeeded by another stalwart of the diploma program, Ann Wee. Ann had been with the diploma program since its inception in 1952,

[50] He became Honorary Secretary of the Singapore Council of Social Service sometime in 1960. Concurrently, he also assisted the PAP government in labor issues, helping to set up the Labour Research Unit. See S. R. Nathan, *Winning Against the Odds: The Labour Research Unit in NTUC's Founding* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, c2011).

[51] The present-day Department of Social Policy has its roots in the Department of Social Sciences and Administration, first founded in 1912 and became the Department of Social Administration after the Second World War. LSE, "Social Policy - Pioneers of the Social Sciences". http://www.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/PioneersOfTheSocialSciences/socialPolicy.aspx. Accessed 12 July 2015.

[52] The degree was in Applied Social Studies. An honors degree only came about in 1985 (for students graduating in 1989). See Nair (ed.), *Ebb and Flow*, pp. 21-22.

[53] Jean Robertson stayed in Singapore for fifteen years, before moving on to the University of Hong Kong in 1967 as Professor of Social Work. Those years saw extensive participation in Singapore's community and the making of social policy. Besides leading and teaching the social studies course, Robertson was also a Juvenile Court magistrate, chairman of the Singapore Children's Society and the Singapore Society for Mentally Retarded Children, member of the Social Welfare Council, and then vice-president of the Singapore Council of Social Service, and a member of government commissions on various social issues, such as social security and prisons. In recognition of her public and academic service, Robertson was awarded the C.M.G. in 1966 and an honorary Doctor of Laws in 1967 – the latter being the first time a woman was awarded the honor by the University of Singapore. Information taken from Hodge (ed.), *Community Problems*, pp. 1-3. She retired in 1972 and died two years later in a car accident in France. See also online biography http://www.universitystory.gla.ac.uk/biography/?id=WH3026&type=P. Accessed 7 July 2015.

serving first as part-time lecturer, then taking on a full-time position from 1957. In between, she worked in the Social Welfare Department, first as a Training Officer and later in the Counselling (sic) and Advice Section. Ann recalls her first responsibilities in the diploma program:

> I took responsibility for organizing the field practice which again was a wonderful way of getting to know what was going on. Because it brought me in touch with… there weren't that many voluntary agencies then, but it brought me in touch with what was going on. Well, we used some very unorthodox placements. I can remember the Personnel Manager of what was then the Harbour Board for instance used to take students.... And we worked with nuns, various nuns who took students for placements.[54]

She also taught classes on family, social services and social history:

> I was also doing a course on a kind of family and culture. [There] was almost nothing published then. So it was very much an issue of getting students to do their own case studies and discuss them because Maurice Freedman's work was not out, Judith's [Djamour] work was not out at that time. It was almost nothing published so it was very much a kind of discussion seminar.... I also built up a little social history course for which I am happy to acknowledge my debt to a number of History Department academic exercises on the Chinese Secretariat or Chinese Protectorate, and then one on the immigration of women being done by an honors student, and another on the history of the Medical Department. I think all of those had been done by 1957 and were good sources for a social history course.[55]

Ann's focus on local history was illustrative of the nature and scope of the social studies diploma program. Along with its sister program in the University of Hong Kong (started in 1950), the University of Malaya course was seen as "truly indigenous and designed to meet local needs".[56] That comment was made in the context of the difficulties social work education had in India. Particularly in the immediate postwar period, the apparent strong influence of American "social and political values" led to a growing disconnect in Indian social work education from the "reality of the situations of local practice...."[57] Even before, the dependence on "foreign material" led to "comparative neglect of the study of the

[54] NAS OHC, Ann Wee, reel 2.
[55] NAS OHC, Ann Wee, reel 2. Freedman completed his study of the Chinese family and kinship in 1953, and published it in 1957. Djamour completed research in 1953, and published her work on the Malay family in 1965.
[56] Hodge, *Community Problems*, p. 68.
[57] Hodge, *Community Problems*, p. 67. Hodge quoted from two articles: P. T. Thomas, "Problems of social work education in India". *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, 28, no. 1 (April 1967), pp. 41-53, and Hans Nagpaul, "The diffusion of American social work education to India: problems and issues". *International Social Work*, 15, no. 1 (1972), pp. 3-17.

history of regional social reform movements, ... research into the application of the foreign theory to local practice ... [and] prolonged the absence of indigenous study material from the curricula, based on Asian cultural, social, economic and political conditions".[58]

In Singapore and Malaya, the lack of published materials did hinder teaching, and as some of the diploma students recalled, content – though indirectly relevant – was based on European experiences. In 1952, the only publication directly related to Singapore society was the 1947 social survey and census reports. Prior to the diploma program, there had been no deliberate and organized studies of Singapore society. The predominantly transient society perhaps largely precluded such a need. After the war, the situation changed. Singapore society was found to be more settled and with a more balanced gender ratio. Coupled with the promise of self-government and the presence of an actual social policy, the need for social data, for policymaking as well as teaching, became more pronounced. From the start, Jean Robertson observed that that was a "move to indigenise" in terms of teaching staff as well as local social workers.[59] She also noted that she and her staff "were determined to make the course, as far as we could, meet the needs of this country".[60] Hence, they began "obtaining Malayan teaching material and developed a system of student dissertations embodying material from direct field studies of social phenomena not previously undertaken".[61] From its inception to its end in 1974, the diploma program produced over a hundred of such dissertations. They illustrated the scholarly assumptions and methods adopted at that time. Driven by the need for information on local conditions, the dissertations were predominantly ethnographical, mirroring the approaches of, for instance, Freedman and Djamour's study of the Chinese and Malay communities in Singapore.

Taken together, the dissertations give an overview of postwar Singapore society and economy. Singapore society then was a kaleidoscope of Straits Chinese, Jews, Malayalees, Ceylon Tamils, Arabs, Javanese, Bhutanese, the various Chinese linguistic groups, and communities from Malay-speaking regions. They lived in urban dwellings, in rural *kampungs* (villages), in a settlement of houses on stilts, or in the southern islands. They were part of an economy that was supported by a variety of vocations, such as seaman, fishermen, *kelong*-makers (*kelongs* are off-shore wooden structures mainly for fishing purposes), soya bean sauce makers, farmers, *amahs* (female, usually elderly, domestic workers), *samsui* female

[58] Hodge, *Community Problems*, p. 67.
[59] Robertson, "Social Work Education", pp. 72-73. She was told to expect to stay "for about ten years".
[60] Robertson, "Social Work Education", p. 74.
[61] Hodge, *Community Problems*, p. 68.

construction laborers (hailing from the Sanshui district in Guangdong, China), lighterage laborers (referring to those transferring cargo from lighter barges), paper boys, hawkers and peddlers, trishaw riders, letter-writers, and *jaga keratas* (a kind of syndicate that charges parking fees, usually illicitly).

For leisure, they listened to opera singers and musicians, news readers, or story-tellers, browsed cheap comic books, or simply gathered with neighbors and friends along the five-footways to escape the dank air of their claustrophobic quarters. The more religious congregated and worshipped at churches, mosques, and temples, located in both urban and rural areas. They moreover provided various forms of social support during times of need. Social support was also available within lineage villages, youth clubs, community centers, or specific voluntary welfare organizations, such as the Chinese benevolent associations and the Society of the St. Vincent de Paul. When sick, some of them did not go to hospitals but preferred to consult the Chinese *sinseh* or the Malay *bomoh*. The chronically ill and dying, mostly single and without the nearness of family, were received at "sick houses" in Chinatown or at community hospitals.

Historically speaking, the dissertations are primary indicators of social issues that arrested the attention of society then (as represented by the student and the supervising teacher). They also reflected the drive to collect more local knowledge and data. Indeed, they were the earliest organized attempts to document and understand aspects of Singapore society. As a result, early dissertations were mostly foundational. They were either ethnographical studies of particular communities and local traditions, or overviews of existing social services or of institutions that provided social support. Over time the topics evolved, keeping pace with the activities of the Social Welfare Department and overall developments in Singapore. Students explored specific issues concerning tuberculosis treatment, opium addiction, probation and rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents, social services for the elderly and indigent, the social and economic impact of blindness, deafness and other disabilities, begging and vagrancy, abandoned children, and (as Singapore's public housing program expanded) the impact of rehousing and resettlement on social relationships. In doing so, they highlight some of the fundamental social concerns of an individual or household living in Singapore (or Malaya), such as family, housing, health, and employment. For instance, the current study's juxtaposition of the experiences of the migrant and domiciled worker in Singapore (respectively Augustin Gomez and Valentine Frois) comes from a dissertation on elderly Public Assistance recipients. Similarly, personal concerns over

postwar housing, employment, living conditions, and their impact on family, were drawn from Chia Cheong Fook's study of hawker "Wong" and hawkers in general.

The dissertations also engaged, directly and indirectly, with the measures and programs that emerged to address such concerns. From there, the dissertations provided a basis to assess the viability and limits of existing policies and services. The correlation between the dissertations and social policy was not always obvious nor was it direct. One notable exception was S. R. Nathan's study of the welfare of seamen in Singapore, which uncovered systemic abuses by owners of seamen lodging houses and led to the creation of a registry. Even so, the Labour Front Government might not have been aware (or inclined to take action), had Jean Robertson not brought it to the attention of then Chief Minister David Marshall.[62] To be sure, the Social Studies diploma program was not created to inform social policy, at least not directly. Its primary objective was to prepare students to execute the myriad aspects of social welfare work. It filled a gap in knowledge and expertise, meeting an immediate need by producing graduates to work in the Social Welfare Department, the Almoner Department (within the Medical Department), and private voluntary welfare organizations. Its dissertations moreover provided the first detailed and deliberate examinations of Singapore's postwar society. In identifying local aspects of society to study, the diploma program delineated a "Singapore" space of sorts, indirectly contributing to a nascent sense of community in late colonial Singapore. These were further augmented by the work the diploma graduates carried out in their professional careers as a social welfare officer, almoner, or social worker, giving coherency and meaning to the social welfare state.

Partnerships: The Singapore Social Welfare Council (1946 to 1958)

The Social Welfare Department was most assuredly not the only organization able and willing to provide social welfare in late colonial Singapore, nor did it sought to be. As stated in the directive, it was policy to form partnerships with the wider community. In any case, the Social Welfare Department did not have exclusivity in providing social services. It was the "new kid on the block", joining the ranks of religious organizations and community associations, as well as family networks, which had been providing basic welfare services

[62] The anecdote goes that Robertson waved Nathan's dissertation in front of Marshall during a meeting, exclaiming "You should be ashamed!" Personal communication to author from Ann Wee. Two years after graduation in 1956, S. R. Nathan took on the position of Seaman Welfare Officer in David Marshall's Labour Front government.

since the early days of the British settlement. The Second World War drastically affected community sources of welfare, which were dependent on contributions from the community, such as religious contributions in the form of tithes or *zakat*, subscriptions to mutual aid associations, or one-time charitable donations. The dislocation of economy and society caused by the war and occupation affected, at least for a time, society's ability to help its less fortunate members.

Welfare services nonetheless continued as best as they could. The major institutions, such as the Salvation Army, the various Christian churches, and community associations, were integral participants in the Singapore Executive of the Malayan Welfare Council during the British Military Administration. Various representatives pushed for urgent, immediate as well as long-term social reforms, such as food and money, basic welfare for the destitute, and youth development. Individual organizations also resumed or continued their welfare activities after the war. The wartime Blue Cross Charitable Institution continued providing much-needed medical and other welfare services for the poor and needy.[63] Religious organizations also resumed basic care and welfare services as best as they could. The Sikh community for instance used one of its temples to care for survivors and victims of the war. Seva Singh, a former official at the Silat Road Sikh Temple, recollected the temple was "turned into a haven for the widows and orphans". They were given food, and for those who wanted to go home, travel expenses.[64]

In addition to assisting the British Military Administration and the civil government, the Salvation Army resumed its own activities in Singapore and Malaya after its enforced hiatus during the occupation. Tan Beng Neo rejoined the organization and helped out with Emergency Relief and later the People's Restaurants. She was then sent up-country to Ipoh to run a girls' home before returning to Singapore in 1947. The Salvation Army was given two properties along Oxley Road (numbers 26 and 30 – the former had been a brothel during the

[63] As stated in the society's rule and regulations (circa 1947): "The main object of this Institution shall be to relieve the poor and the distressed. It shall carry out the following activities: (a) To give free medical treatment, to give monetary relief, to give free congee and tea, to provide free coffins and to give free clothing; (b) to assist in the carrying out of any international charitable enterprise; (c) to foster co-operation among the members and to cultivate closer friendship among them; and (d) to worship the TAI HONG [sic] patron saint, to pay respects to the BUDDHA [sic] and to study Buddhist doctrine". It also described the banner (logo): "The banner of the institution shall consist of a "Blue Cross" on a white background with red hemming, the idea being to follow the ideal of the "Red Cross" which is to relieve the needy and save the wounded and that of the "Black Cross" which is to collect the dead and give them free burials. The objects of the "Blue Cross" being the amalgamation of the ideals of the two sister societies mentioned above are therefore to give relief and to provide free coffins for burials. The red hemming signifies a sincere heart and unity". (NAS, microfilm number NA 541).

[64] NAS OHC, Seva Singh. Communities of Singapore (Part 2). Accession Number 000418. Interviewed in 1984. Reel 17 (of 22).

occupation), and refurbished them into a church and a girls' home.[65] It also established a Boys' Home along Thomson Road (near the junction with Moulmein Road), which was before the war and for a short time after the only remand institution for male juveniles in Singapore.

Postwar circumstances converged with late colonial policy to give a sense of urgency to redressing social problems to help shore up an ailing empire. Colonial social policy, as well-intended and/or self-serving as it might have been, still lacked the knowledge, expertise, and in some instances the resources, to carry out social welfare work. Hence, there were sustained attempts throughout the late colonial period to work with existing voluntary organizations. Those attempts initially produced the Pan-Malayan Welfare Council, and the Singapore Executive on the island itself for the duration of the British Military Administration. From April 1946, with the creation of two new colonial territories, the Malayan Union and the crown colony of Singapore, the Malayan Welfare Council was replaced two separate welfare councils. In June 1946, the Singapore Executive had its final meeting, ending its short but eventful tenure with some acrimony. The following month in July, a new Social Welfare Council was inaugurated by the Governor of Singapore.[66] A key difference this time was the presence of a fully functioning Social Welfare Department, which was busy operating the communal feeding schemes and in the midst of taking over former Singapore Executive initiatives, such as youth clubs and child feeding. Another significant difference was the appointment of the Secretary for Social Welfare as the Chairman of the Council, whereas earlier, members of the Singapore Executive had elected the first chairman.

The intimate involvement of the state could be perceived as a literal interpretation of the social welfare policy directive, a copy of which was circulated at the Council's first meeting.[67] The direct appointment of the Secretary of Social Welfare to lead the new council, including an additional five government officials and four Governor-nominees, reflected the probable attempt to avoid earlier tensions.[68] From the start, it seemed clear that the Council was an extension of state apparatus for social welfare. The "society" portion of the Council was not very different from that of the Singapore Executive, with representatives from the

[65] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 16.
[66] *The Straits Times*, 27 July 1946, "Welfare Council Inaugurated", and *The Singapore Free Press*, 27 July 1946, "Singapore Welfare Council Inaugurated". See NAS, BMA CH 27/45 for text of speeches and minutes of meeting.
[67] NAS, BMA CH 27/45. Social Welfare Policy Directive.
[68] Official representation came from the Medical, Education, Co-operation and Labour Departments, the Chinese Secretariat, and the Municipality. See Appendix A in *Beginnings* for a full list of members in 1946.

Anglican and Catholic churches, the Salvation Army, the Blue Cross, the World Red Swastika Society, and the Young Men and Women Christian Associations.[69] The religious bodies and voluntary organizations were invited to join, and they were hardly an accurate representation of Singapore's diverse society at the time.

Governor Gimson reiterated the intent of the policy directive in his address inaugurating the Social Welfare Council. The Council existed to utilize "local knowledge and experience" of the communities, and as a platform for "expressing opinions, and making suggestions" on anything connected to social welfare.[70] The Council, like the Singapore Executive, did not have executive or fund-raising powers. Unlike the Singapore Executive however, the Council had far less room to maneuver. The former operated in a context of rapid flux and hence had substantially more leeway in introducing and executing welfare plans. Activities by the Council were comparatively much more restrained, non-existent even, with fewer initiatives driven by the organization. The presence of an operational Social Welfare Department was a considerable contributory factor, as it performed the welfare work the Council could have done. In the initial stages, the Social Welfare Council met monthly. For each meeting, the Social Welfare Department circulated a report of the department's activities and progress of the previous month for council members to peruse. In the early years, roughly from 1946 to 1953, the substantial amount of social welfare activity provided focal points for council meetings, such as People's Restaurants, care and protection of vulnerable sections of society, the social survey, the social welfare conference, and the Five-Year Plan. Several Council members were also members of the former Singapore Executive. They retained a keen interest in developments in youth and infant welfare, public health and nutrition, and the care of displaced persons and the destitute.[71]

Not all members agreed with the leading role taken by the Social Welfare Department. Hints of dissent were recorded in the minutes of the early meetings. One of them was before the 1947 conference, specifically over the role of the state in social welfare.[72] McNeice pushed strongly for a consensus from all Council members. In response, Reverend Kinross Nicholson, representing the Bishop of Singapore, warned that government intervention could

[69] Later expanded to include representatives from the Methodist Mission, the Singapore Buddhist Association, and the Ramakrishna Mission. See appendices of various SWDARs for annual listing of member organizations.
[70] NAS, BMA CH 27/45. Full speech included in minutes of inaugural meeting. Also reported in *The Straits Times*, 27 July 1946, "Welfare Council Inaugurated", and *The Singapore Free Press*, 27 July 1946, "Singapore Welfare Council Inaugurated".
[71] Sub-committees were formed for Women and Girls, Youth and others. No records found of their proceedings, but usually reported and minuted during council meetings.
[72] NAS, SCA 5/47. 9 August 1947.

easily "undermine the foundations in society by destroying people's sense of personal responsibility". He referred to the child feeding scheme as an example of government prolonging an essentially temporary measure. Instead, "[what] Social Welfare should aim at was placing a family in a position to which it could earn enough to support itself".[73] The "central function of the state" should be limited to the "administration of justice".[74] If there was support for Nicholson, it was not recorded.[75] Yap Pheng Geck disagreed, and stated that social welfare should not merely be a concern but a duty of government. His view was supported by the representatives of the Salvation Army and the World Red Swastika, allowing McNeice to claim "full support" from the Social Welfare Council for the arguments made in the conference papers.[76]

Yap Pheng Geck, as Vice-Chairman, suggested the Council "should have a long term plan" similar to the long-term plans by various government departments. Inspired by the social welfare conference and an International Labor Organization conference on social security and social policy, Yap felt that the Council "should not only consider problems as they arose, but plan ahead, towards improving general welfare and better conditions".[77] Yap's proposal was superseded by the Social Welfare Department's preparations for the Five-Year Plan, which in turn obstructed meaningful follow-up by the Council. A preliminary draft of the Five-Year Plan was circulated to council members, which led to Nicholson wondering about the Council's position".[78] He pointed out the difference between the Council "advising Government" and the Council considering a "memorandum which had apparently been adopted".[79] The Chairman's plea of time constraint due to a pressing deadline was an indication of the unfortunate static role of the Council vis-à-vis the Social Welfare Department and social welfare in Singapore. The Council became an extension of the Social Welfare Department and by relation, the state. Meeting discussions focused almost exclusively at times on clarifying and/or critiquing the Social Welfare Department's progress

[73] NAS, SCA 5/47. 9 August 1947.
[74] NAS, SCA 5/47. 9 August 1947.
[75] There is no clear evidence of dissent from the filed minutes of Social Welfare Council meetings. There were recorded instances of queries that do suggest some suspicion of official intentions and their implications for voluntary and non-governmental services. The Bishop of Singapore once queried whether the Council was an "official" body given that 60% of its members were from the government. See NAS, SCA 5/47, 9 May 1947.
[76] It should be noted that the final date recorded in the filed minutes was 30 August 1947, six days after the end of the Conference.
[77] NAS SCA 5/47. 9 August 1947
[78] NAS, SCA 6/48. Minutes January 1948
[79] NAS, SCA 6/48. Minutes January 1948.

and activities.[80] Beyond one-off events organized by member organizations, which were rare as the Council had no executive or fund-raising powers, there was little to no actual coordination of social welfare activities. Such a development was not anticipated by the original social welfare policy directive.

After July 1953, council meetings went from monthly to quarterly. The change was supposedly due to a more stable social situation, hence necessitating fewer official meetings.[81] But perhaps more accurately, council meetings were not always well-attended and became "almost entirely a body for the Secretary for Social Welfare to talk to...."[82] Such a situation was predicted to some extent by external observers. In 1948, W. H. Chinn, the social welfare adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, had thought it "preferable that [the Social Welfare Council] should be presided over by a Chairman with no particular departmental or sectional interests".[83] His comments were only acted on much later, coinciding with the arrival of Tom Cromwell, a more dynamic Secretary for Social Welfare similar to McNeice and Hughes. From late 1954, discussions began in earnest to replace the Social Welfare Council with a new organization along the lines of social service councils operating or soon to be in operation in the Federation of Malaya and Hong Kong.[84] Those councils had fully elected executive bodies. State presence was restricted to an observer role.

An inert Social Welfare Council, as well as constitutional developments in Singapore (which did complicate the standing of the Social Welfare Department vis-à-vis the Council), meant progress was slow. The idea for a new national body overseeing social service was first mooted during a council meeting in October 1954. Not much headway was made in 1955 despite Cromwell's repeated efforts to cajole council members into action. The Social Welfare Department was forced to take the lead, in framing the discussion and undertaking

[80] This put representatives from the Social Welfare Department and other government departments in an awkward position, as they were expected to defend state policy. An instance of a break in ranks took place in 1949, when Tom Eames Hughes, concurrently Secretary for Social Welfare and Council Chairman, supported a council resolution that viewed with "grave concern" the delay in filling staff vacancies. (NAS, SCA 4/49, 8 Dec 1949). This provoked a stiff response from senior officials in the Colonial Secretary Office, one of whom thought that the problem had been presented in "undesirable language" and outside the remit of the Council. (NAS, CSO 921/49. File minutes).

[81] NAS, SCA 2/53. 16 June 1953.

[82] NUSCL, CO 1030/274. Observation was made by Tom Cromwell, Secretary, then Director, for Social Welfare from 1953 to 1957. Cromwell to Chinn, 9 November 1954.

[83] NUSCL, CO 1030/274. Chinn to Cromwell, December 1954. Chinn quoted from his report made in 1948 after his visit to Singapore.

[84] NAS, SCA 159/53 and 2/55. 8 October 1954, 21 January 1955, and 15 April 1955. Cromwell referenced the pending council of social service to be formed in the Federation of Malaya, and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service. The former did not materialize, remaining as the Central Welfare Council (since its inception in 1946), while the latter (first established in 1947) was a statutory board since 1951.

the spadework, so as to break the inertia. In 1956, it circulated a memo to forty-eight voluntary organizations in Singapore. The memo spelled out the rationale for a national social service council independent of government and sought feedback (and tacit approval).[85] Slightly over half responded (twenty-seven), with a clear majority assenting to the proposed change. A sub-committee within the Council was formed to draft a new constitution.[86] After a year-long discussion, the constitution was finally approved in principle in October 1957 by the Council.[87]

The Singapore Council of Social Service

The Singapore Council of Social Service was inaugurated on 22 December 1958, and held its first general meeting in March 1959.[88] Lee Kong Chian, rubber and pineapple tycoon-cum-philanthropist, served as founding President until his retirement for health reasons in 1964.[89] The new organization could not be more different from the Social Welfare Council. It had a fully elected executive committee, was empowered to initiate relief schemes, to raise funds and then distribute financial aid. State presence was reduced to observers from relevant government departments, or at the very least, was absorbed into a more inclusive decision-making process.

The inauguration event made a mockery of the Social Welfare Council's limited scope and representation. Representatives from over sixty different organizations attended, the vast majority voluntary and non-governmental.[90] Freed from earlier shackles, the new council was much more active than its predecessor. It raised and helped distribute financial relief to victims of fires and floods, almost immediately after the inaugural meeting.[91] The new

[85] NAS, SCA 16/56, 20 April 1956.
[86] NAS, SCA 16/56, 20 July 1956. The subcommittee comprised Harry Wee (representing the Singapore Youth Council), R. Boswell from the Rural Board, and Woon Wah Siang from the Social Welfare Department.
[87] NAS, SCA 10/57, 25 October 1957. There was a dissenting opinion (by Harry Wee) over membership. His opinion was not fully elucidated in the council minutes, but it stemmed from membership and organizational control of the new council. NAS, SWD 33/56 may contain more details and correspondence on the matter.
[88] Minutes of inauguration and general meetings are filed in NAS, SCA 83/59 and MLW (Ministry of Labour and Welfare) 35/59 respectively. See public announcements in *The Singapore Free Press*, 29 July 1958, "They Will Link Welfare Groups in Singapore", and *The Straits Times*, 23 December 1958, "New welfare council launched by Lim".
[89] Lee died three years later in 1967, leaving behind – via the Lee Foundation – a strong legacy in philanthropy. He was succeeded by Ee Peng Liang, a former Social Welfare Council member who represented the Catholic Church.
[90] NAS, SCA 83/56. File includes records of inaugural meeting, invited organizations and actual attendees.
[91] The interim committee was called into action almost immediately, distributing relief for victims of a big fire in Tiong Bahru in 1959. See *The Straits Times*, 5 February 1959, "Council to Co-ordinate Flood and Fire Relief Measures" and *The Singapore Free Press*, 14 February 1959, "Firemen still there after all-night watch".

council made a genuine attempt to coordinate social welfare work in Singapore. Its key activities included publishing on a semi-regular basis a directory of social services and organizing fund-raising events in the form of "welfare exhibitions".[92] In its latter years, particularly during the 1970s, it also commissioned and published research studies on various social issues confronting individuals and families.[93] The nature and scope of the Singapore Council of Social Service would change over the years.[94] But its establishment in 1958 and subsequent development symbolized to some extent a more involved Singapore society (whether it might have wanted it or not) in addressing social problems of the day. There were always concerns about institutional independence, not just from the state, but also from each other. During a meeting to discuss a near-final draft of the new constitution, "great satisfaction" was expressed by all members when informed that, other than membership subscription, the new council would not collect and centralize funds of individual organizations.[95] A centralized relief fund, controlled by the Social Welfare Council, never materialized less because of state interference, and more due to the absence of a consensus between non-official council members. Even for some, independence from the state was not entirely undesirable. A Social Welfare Council member, admittedly not from a voluntary organization, actually questioned the assumption that a government official should not continue head the new social welfare body.[96] Needless to say, his opinion did not carry much weight with both government and non-government council members.

In terms of substantive contributions, the Social Welfare Council is admittedly less significant historically compared to the Social Welfare Department or individual voluntary

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[92] Singapore Council of Social Service, *The Helping Hand: Singapore Council of Social Service Directory of Voluntary Welfare Organisations* (Singapore: The Council, 1961). Other editions were published by SCSS in 1970, 1985, and 1988. The National Council of Social Service published similar directories after 1992.

[93] At least one study led to the introduction of a new assistance scheme in the early 1980s, the Rent and Utilities Assistance Scheme, for families in need renting one- and two-room HDB flats. See Singapore Council of Social Service Research Committee, *The Social and Welfare Needs of Families Living in one- and two-room HDB flats* (Singapore: The Council, 1980). A list of research studies (as at 1983) can be found in Singapore Council of Social Service, *Twenty Five Years of Social Service: Silver Jubilee Publication of the Singapore Council of Social Service* (Singapore: Singapore Council Social Service, 1983), pp. 32-33.

[94] The SCSS was made a statutory body in 1968, and reconstituted as the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) in 1992. It was also responsible for establishing the Community Chest, a centralized fund-raiser to help voluntary organizations focus more on provision of services. Its website provides an overview of the range of services and activities it provides. National Council of Social Service, https://www.ncss.gov.sg/. Accessed 21 June 2015. For overviews of SCSS' activities, see *For all we care: 50 years of social service in Singapore, 1958-2008* (Singapore: National Council of Social Service, 2008), and Tan Siew Sang, "Social welfare services in Singapore with special focus on the Singapore Council of Social Service 1959-1980" (Unpublished academic exercise--Dept. of History, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, 1983).

[95] NAS, SCA 10/57. 25 January 1957.

[96] NAS, SCA 159/53. 8 October 1954. The member's point was based on the premise that most if not all of the Social Welfare Council's initiatives had originated from the government.

organizations. Still, and though mostly inspired or encouraged by state officials, some of its work were path-breaking and did lay the foundations for future development in Singapore's social services. The Singapore Youth Council for instance originated from Council deliberations about youth welfare (and continues today as the National Youth Council).[97] Council meetings moreover are a valuable record of the process of shaping the boundaries and nature of social welfare work in Singapore, such as Yap Pheng Geck shoring up support for the Social Welfare Department before the 1947 social welfare conference, members raising concerns about staffing issues in the Social Welfare Department, or Constance Goh defending the child feeding scheme (see following section). Council members also pointed out gaps in services to individuals with special needs.[98] Though rebuffed every time, several Council members also kept alive the discussion for a centralized relief fund, called a "Community Chest", to respond quickly to and more effectively organize donations for civil disasters.[99] On a broader level, the origins and (arrested) development of the Social Welfare Council also inform a history of social policy in late colonial Singapore. From the state's perspective, an inert Social Welfare Council illustrated that a policy of coordination and cooperation could not succeed just because it was so ordered. In many areas, it was the Social Welfare Department that had to take the first step.

Postwar Developments in Social Services

Nonetheless, an inert Social Welfare Council was not illustrative of an inert Singapore society, taking action only when prodded or led by the state. The postwar period witnessed

[97] Due to the social dislocation caused by war and occupation, youth welfare had always been a concern since the return of the British. Proposal for a youth council was first raised in 1947 (NAS, SCA 5/47), and formally established in 1948. (*The Straits Times*, 7 February 1948, "Singapore Youth Council Formed"). A record of its genesis can also be found in NAS, CSO 584/48. "Proposal for Youth Council".

[98] Special needs here refer to care for those with physical and mental disabilities (or handicaps as used then). There were council discussions in 1951 to set up a home dedicated for juvenile "mental defectives" those under sixteen years of age, as well as "mental decrepits" for which no amount of medical assistance was of further use. (NAS, SCA 12/51. July, October and November meetings).

[99] As early as 1946 and 1947, discussions had taken place on the viability of a centralized relief organization or fund to help victims of civil disasters and other emergencies, or to initiate schemes independent of government. But no progress was made due to disagreements within the Council. Matter was raised again in August 1951 in response to a fire in Kampong Bugis (NAS, SCA 12/51), but with no results. Though the Social Welfare Department did participate in the creation of a Singapore Joint Relief Organisation in October 1951, the Council itself was not involved. (Some overview of the SJRO's activities, which went beyond financial relief and for a time into providing emergency housing can be found in Loh Kah Seng's unpublished doctoral dissertation "The 1961 Kampong Bukit Ho Swee Fire and the Making of Modern Singapore"). In October 1954, discussions took place but also again with little outcome. By 1955, the issue had been, in the words of a head of the Social Welfare Department, "battered to and fro like a well beaten shuttlecock". (NAS, SCA 2/55. 24 August 1955). An actual Community Chest fund would not come about until 1983.

some of Singapore's more vibrant (and at times violent) years, partly a result of the emergence of a plethora of social organizations. In 1961, the Singapore Council of Social Service published a directory, *The Helping Hand*, which recorded sixty social service agencies - and these were only the ones that had responded and agreed to be part of the published directory. Taken together, they provided a broad range of services for youths, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities and others in need, covering a variety of social needs at different stages in life as well as unexpected emergencies.

Some of the organizations managed to maintain activities carried out before and during the war. Many others were not recorded, as the social and welfare services provided might have been ad hoc or on a non-statutory basis, such as family and personal relations, or assistance derived from community mutual aid associations, *kongsi* houses (clan halls), and places of worship.[100] As best as they can, they resumed their welfare activities after the war, meeting urgent needs of oftentimes desperate people. As mentioned earlier, the convent home for abandoned babies for instance became so busy and crowded, so much so nuns had to be stationed at the convent gates round the clock. Medical needs were even more pronounced after war and occupation, due to the spread of infectious diseases like tuberculosis. Urgent needs were moreover not the only concern. The "everyday" mundane needs of people at different stages in their lives would require care and assistance.

For instance, the Kwong Wai Siu Free Hospital not only provided medical care, but also an important but understated service to Cantonese and other Chinese migrants who had little or no family or community support. The free hospital, supported primarily by the Cantonese community, was part of a network of fellow community hospitals, religious institutions, and the smaller, purpose-built "sick-receiving houses" or "death houses", which provided a basic service for those near the end of their lives or chronically ill. They provided accommodation, basic medical care, and burial services for the impoverished and chronically ill.[101] Case studies collected in the late 1950s provide a depressing tale of the chronically ill and the dying. Those individuals were elderly (usually fifty years and above) and predominantly from the working class. The majority of case studies were of those afflicted

[100] Information on these social institutions can be found in Majorie Topley, *Cantonese Society in Hong Kong and Singapore: Gender, Religion, Medicine and Money / Essays by Marjorie Topley*; edited and introduced by Jean DeBernardi (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), and the early sociological studies by Maurice Freedman and Judith Djamour of the Chinese and Malay communities. Studies of such services can also be found in dissertations produced by the Social Studies Diploma program, later Department of Social Studies.
[101] Lim Teck Seng, "The chronic sick and the dying in Singapore" (Unpublished academic exercise - Dept. of Social Studies, University of Malaya, 1959).

with tuberculosis or chest-related ailments, and were unable to work to support themselves. The males usually had family in Singapore, Malaya or in China, but for various reasons were unable to call on them for support. The females were for the most part on their own or widowed. They would have visited doctors until no further help could be given. They then turned to community hospitals and sick receiving houses (facilities that admitted the chronically ill or dying with a view to give them a proper burial upon death) that would give them, as and when space permitted, a bed and care until they passed on.[102] The state's involvement was in the form of monetary assistance to the individual or grants to the institution via the Social Welfare Department.

The majority of the social service agencies recorded in the 1961 directory were established after the war. To some extent, their presence was indicative of particularly urgent social issues that were not fully addressed by the state or society at large. The Social Welfare Department was merely one of many providing social and welfare services in postwar Singapore, and even then, meeting needs that were more general than specific. The department did play the role of facilitator in pulling together support for certain specific needs. For instance, it had a direct hand in the genesis of associations to aid the blind, and the "deaf and dumb", established in 1951 and 1955 respectively.[103] In other areas, individuals from Singapore society stepped up. Tuberculosis was considered a public menace in the immediate postwar years. Predominantly through the efforts of the Rotary Club of Singapore, the Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association (SATA) was formally established in 1947.[104] It raised funds for its first clinic with x-ray facilities, opened in 1948 within a building that also housed the St. Andrews' Mission Hospital in Tanjong Pagar.[105] The multiplicity and depth of

[102] Lim, "The chronic sick", pp. 142-146.
[103] Basic background information published in *The Helping Hand*. The Social Welfare Department was partly involved in the genesis of these associations, both of which have continued to this present-day. The Society for the Deaf and Dumb (known today as the Singapore Association for the Deaf) was established in August 1955, mainly via the efforts of the Red Cross and the Rotary, while the Association for the Blind (known today as the Singapore Association for the Visually Handicapped) came about in 1951 almost directly via the efforts of the Social Welfare Department finding a sponsor to convene the organization. See various meeting minutes of the Social Welfare Council between 1950 and 1956 for brief overview of developments.
[104] *The Straits Times*, 3 June 1947, "Anti-T.B. Meeting Today". Brief overview of organization's history can be found in Lim Kay Tong and Mary Lee, *Fighting TB: the SATA story (1947-1997)* (Singapore: Singapore Anti-Tuberculosis Association, 1997), and on its website at http://www.sata.com.sg/about_us/our-history/ (Accessed 4 July 2015), and *The SATA Story: Celebrating 65 Years of Caring for the Community*. Available online: http://www.sata.com.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/SATA-e-book_v7_9Oct12_FINAL.pdf (Accessed 4 July 2015). In 1954, Lee Kong Chian donated his massive South Winds resort in the West Coast area for a TB settlement for patients to recover, while G. Uttamram donated land in Upper Changi for a additional clinic.
[105] *The Singapore Free Press*, 1 December 1948, "SATA Makes a Good Start". For efforts to raise funds and obstacles, see also *The Straits Times*, 19 June 1947, "Rotary T.B. Clinic Suggested"; *The Straits Times*, 7 August 1947, "T.B. Fund"; *The Straits Times*, 26 July 1947, "Dr. Vickers & discouraged T.B. Patients".

postwar social needs also transformed familiar sources of welfare and social services. Between 1954 and 1958, with support from the USA-based Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Welfare Services Singapore (later Catholic Welfare Society) provided aid in kind and monetary grants to Catholic and non-Catholic individuals and organizations.[106]

Somewhat curiously, the 1961 directory did not include organizations established by women providing services for women and their families. Before the Emergency in 1948 made them illegal, war survivors, victims and their dependents, were the focus of several associations related to the former Anti-Japanese Army and the Malayan Communist Party, such as the Pan-Malayan Women's Federation and the Singapore Women's Mutual Aid Association of Victims' Families. Malay and Muslim women were also especially active in responding to their brethren's needs. In 1947, Che Zahara binte Noor Mohamed formed the Malay Women's Welfare Association, the first Malay organization to focus exclusively on women. The association began with the simple aim of soliciting donations to maintain a place of shelter for orphans, widows, and destitute and impoverished Malay women, later expanding its services to meet their educational, social, and professional needs.[107] In 1952, Khatijun Nissa Siraj, along with other Muslim women, formed the Young Women's Muslim Association (also known today as the *Persatuan Permudi Islam Singapura* or PPIS).[108] Its main objective was to establish a family court to protect Muslim women and children from errant husbands and fathers.[109] In the same year, against the backdrop of polygamy, spousal abuse, and exploitation, a group of women led by Shirin Fodzer, Che Zahara and others, formally inaugurated the Singapore Council of Women. Throughout the 1950s, council members advocated legislative change to protect the rights of women in marriage and in society, efforts that eventually culminated in the passing of the Women's Charter in 1961.[110]

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[106] Originally known War Relief Services (an agency of the National in 1943, it officially became the Catholic Relief Services in 1955, helping to distribute US aid internationally. A brief history is available online at Catholic Relief Services History, http://www.crs.org/about/history/. Accessed 3 July 2015. A detailed study of the work of a Catholic charitable organization can be found in Lau Sun Leong. "The society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Singapore: a study of the social welfare services provided by a Roman Catholic charitable organization" (Unpublished academic exercise - Dept. of Social Studies, University of Malaya, 1959).

[107] See also *The Straits Times*, 16 October 1950, "Women Say: Abolish Child Marriage".

[108] NAS OHC, Mohamed Siraj (Mrs) @ Khatijun Nissa Siraj. Women Through the Years: Economic & Family Lives. Accession No. 001663. Interviewed in 1995 and 1996. Reels 16, 17, and 18 (of 36).

[109] Calls for a Muslim court came about in the wake of the Maria Hertogh unrest in 1950. Early plans did not come to fruition. A bill was drafted in 1955 and was passed in 1957 with the passing of the Muslim Ordinance. Judith Djamour, *The Muslim matrimonial court in Singapore* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1966). See also *The Straits Times*, 12 February 1955, "Women want a voice in war on divorce", and *The Straits Times*, 7 September 1955, "A Voice for Muslim Women".

[110] The genesis of the SCW took place in the year before in 1951. See Chew, "The Singapore Council of Women and the Women's Movement".

The history of Singapore's postwar women's movement has been developed elsewhere. What is relevant here is how the emergence of women organizations highlighted deeper structural issues within Singapore society that lay outside the immediate scope of the Social Welfare Department. *The Straits Times'* feature articles on children in Singapore and Malaya mentioned above had a clear objective. The graphic descriptions of overcrowding, disease, physical abuse, child trafficking and the spread of other illicit activities were precursors to the formation of a new Singapore Children's Society in April 1952.[111] Formed to counter and to raise awareness about child abuse and neglect, the society was one of the first social service agencies in Singapore to actively use casework to inquire into the needs of a family so as to help their children.[112] Within a year of its inception, the society secured financial support from the Lee Foundation to sponsor the study of professional social work.[113] In 1953, it hired one of earliest professional social workers in Singapore (the first by a voluntary organization), an Ethel Barbara Kinna (nee Paglar), who had trained in London and Sydney previously.

The genesis of the Singapore Children Society did provoke a small controversy that unfolded in letters to *The Straits Times*. Banker Tan Chin Tuan questioned the wisdom of creating a society that potentially duplicated work already done by the Social Welfare Department.[114] The response was fast and furious, the salient point being that officialdom was limited by what they knew (or what was reported to them), whereas the "general public could see more", and hence theoretically could respond more effectively.[115] The clash in views raised a point about the place of the Social Welfare Department in postwar Singapore. The Singapore Children's Society was welcomed by the Social Welfare Department, with promises of cooperation.[116] In doing so, the latter also implicitly recognized its limits in carrying out welfare work, at least from its vantage point. In fact, the encouragement,

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[111] One of the initial names suggested was the Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Children. See *The Straits Times*, 5 February 1952, "Society to protect the children", 25 February 1952, "End Cruelty to Children Aim", and 26 February 1952, "70 Could Not Agree on a Name". Eventually agreed on organization name in April: *The Straits Times*, 17 April 1952, "Children's Society".

[112] For an overview of her activities, see *The Straits Times*, 16 October 1952, "These 12 will investigate child welfare"; 2 April 1954, "Her job: to help poor families"; 6 April 1954, "Children's Society is tackling the problem"; 19 August 1954, "Uproar can't halt her work of mercy"

[113] *The Straits Times*, 18 October 1953, "University Girl Gets Bursary".

[114] *The Straits Times*, 9 February 1952, "Mr. Tan Chin Tuan and The Children".

[115] *The Straits Times*, 14 February 1952, "Case of The Adopted Child", and 16 February 1952, "Thinking about the Colony's children".

[116] *The Singapore Free Press*, 29 December 1951, "Department Welcomes Welfare Move", and *The Straits Times,* 18 April 1952, "Children's Society: Social Welfare Will Co-operate". The then Secretary for Social Welfare offered the new organization a desk in its offices to be in touch with the Women and Children's section.

deliberate or otherwise, of voluntary work had always been an underlying objective of the Department. Situated within the wider representation of interests of the Singapore Council of Social Service, the Social Welfare Department was merely one of many in a community actively working to right social wrongs, and in doing so, began to cultivate some sense of ownership and responsibility for a broader purpose. This movement was not necessarily Singaporean or Malayan in its essence. But in stepping forward to take some form of ownership over social issues, the foundations of a community began to be formed.

Unintended Outcomes: Child Nutrition to Family Planning

This sense of taking responsibility was prevalent in the formation of the Singapore Family Planning Association in 1949. Its history reflected more than a mere narrative of plugging gaps left by the Social Welfare Department. The establishment of the Association has roots in the child feeding scheme that was introduced by the Singapore Executive and then managed by the Social Welfare Department. Moreover, if the Social Welfare Council's transition to the Singapore Council of Social Service was partly the result of state policy, the Family Planning Association was an unintended outcome of a state policy to address child malnutrition.

The Child Feeding Scheme

The child feeding scheme, created under the auspices of the Singapore Executive, had the ambitious objective of providing all children at least one nutritious meal per day. But it started off and remained small. The child feeding sub-committee survived the demise of the Singapore Executive. Led by W. J. Vickers, former chair of the Singapore Executive and the civil government's Director for Medical Services, the committee made plans to ensure the scheme continued under civil government. The scheme covered three main age-groups, infants under two years of age, children between two and six years, and school-going children of six years and above. The Education Department was responsible for the third group, while the first two groups had come under the Municipal Health Department. In June 1946, the committee recommended the new Social Welfare Department be responsible for children of school-going age as well as those who could not be fed anymore by the Municipal Infant

Welfare Service, referring to children over two years of age.[117] The Secretary for Social Welfare rebuffed this initial attempt to share responsibility. McNeice communicated, through the Colonial Secretary, rather tersely that "at [that early] stage of [the Social Welfare Department's] development it has the work it can cope with".[118] He also gave instructions to his deputy, Hughes, to avoid accepting any "major commitments" on this matter during committee meetings. The committee then attempted to persuade the Municipal Commissioners to take up the scheme, building on the Municipal Health Department's Infant Welfare Services' earlier experiences in child feeding.[119] But the Municipal Commissioners begged off, citing insufficient physical space in their two infant welfare clinics (for a potential 3,000 meals per day), the absence of staff and organization to operate the scheme on top of the clinic's regular duties.[120]

In view of this setback, McNeice, possibly at the urging of Hughes, agreed to assume responsibility of the feeding of children between two and six years of age. In September 1946, The committee made available roughly $120,000 for the Social Welfare Department to start off the scheme for the remaining four months of 1946, riding on the on-going communal feeding program then. But uncertainty over government approval of funds delayed the opening of the first child feeding center in November 1946.[121] The government eventually undertook to provide $360,000 for the whole of 1947 to provide free meals to about 40,000 children.[122] This amount was still not enough to cover all children (within designated age-group) in Singapore, and hence it was decided to give priority to children of families receiving financial relief from the Social Welfare Department. Even then, money for staff and other organizational needs were only one part of the equation. Physical sites also had to be located and procured, staff recruited to run the centers and manage the children. It was only on 2 January 1947 that the scheme began in the child crèches in Victoria Street and New Market Road. Child feeding centers on new premises could only open later in the month.[123]

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[117] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. 20 June 1946.
[118] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. 12 July 1946.
[119] For a brief background, see Lee Y. K., "The origins of the municipal health department, Singapore", in *Singapore medical journa*l, 09/1977, Volume 18, Issue 3. For the municipal health department's activities, see also Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space*, Lenore Manderson, *Sickness and the State*; and *The Straits Times*, 22 July 1937, "Babies Born in Cubicles".
[120] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. 28 August 1946.
[121] *The Straits Times*, 23 November 1946, "Lack of Money for Child Feeding Plan". See also *The Singapore Free Press*, 27 November 1946, "Baby in a Dust Bin".
[122] *The Second Report*, p. 33. Also announced in *The Singapore Free Press*, 30 December 1946, "New Feeding Scheme Starts Jan. 2".
[123] NAS, BMA HQSD 432/45. 30 December1946.

Once it started going however, the scheme expanded quickly. By February, nine additional centers were opened. By the end of the year, twenty-three were operational, serving a total of 810,000 meals for a daily average of some 4,000 meals for the whole year.[124] Meals were cooked at a central kitchen located at the General Hospital, and then distributed to the centers or via mobile canteens. Here, the advantages of an agency capable of large-scale feeding operations compared to a committee with well-intended goals but diverse priorities and little operational power. Despite some common ground in the health and general well-being of children, the Medical and Education Departments were structured for different objectives and hence had different work processes.[125] The feeding program for school-going children were discontinued in 1947, with the Education Department deciding to leverage on the Social Welfare Department's child feeding program instead.[126] The Medical Department on the other hand, with Vickers providing a connection to the early child feeding experiments, continued to provide nutritional and medical expertise for the child feeding program. Moreover, as the incidence of tuberculosis among children increased from 1947, the Medical Department became more proactive.[127] In 1949, a small feeding program was created for a limited number of children diagnosed with tuberculosis.[128]

Money, similar to food, was tight and the postwar rehabilitation of Singapore was costly, particularly with the creation of new government departments and services.[129] On the other hand, the tried and tested machinery the Social Welfare Department had built up for its communal feeding program was easily expanded to include child feeding quickly and more efficiently. A *Singapore Free Press* correspondent described the scene at a child feeding center, located behind an infant welfare clinic at Prinsep Street:

> At nine o'clock in the morning children began gathering outside the gates of the Centre. At 9.30 the gates are opened by a burly Sikh who lets the children run into the Centre in small groups. The rest of the children play outside or pacify their smaller brothers and sisters until their turn comes to file into the

[124] *The Second Report*, p. 36.
[125] *The Singapore Free Press*, 17 July 1946, "Mr Attlee Ordered Free Meals for S'pore".
[126] *Annual Report / Department of Education, Colony of Singapore* (Singapore: The Department). [EDAR] for 1947, p. 60, and EDAR for 1949, p. 97. School-going children did not benefit directly from the Social Welfare Department's feeding programs. See *The Singapore Free Press*, 10 December 1946, "Money Before Food".
[127] MDAR for 1947, pp. 22-23, 49-50.
[128] MDAR for 1949, pp. 59-60. The same report observed that by 1949 the rationale for child feeding had changed from the earlier need to alleviate hunger and address malnutrition (and disease) to feeding for higher health standards. See MDAR for 1949, pp. 65.
[129] Towards the end of 1946, the heavy expenditure by the government, particularly on new government departments and services, was criticized by a member of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce. *The Straits Times*, 6 September 1946 "Heavy Expenditure Criticised – Cost of New Singapore Departments". See also various newspaper articles from September to December 1946 on the advent of the income tax in Singapore.

> weighing room. Each child is weighed at regular intervals before going into the dining room and the records are sent to Dr. Oliveiro, head of the Nutrition Unit of the King Edward VII College of Medicine. After being weighed the children file past a window where their cards are endorsed for each meal and they are each given a metal disc entitling them to one meal. Once they have passed the window, all their orderly quietness deserts them – they race down the passage shouting to their friends and pushing to get ahead of one another at the serving counter. The metal disc drop into a mug and they pick up their mess tins and mugs and make straight for the table they chose to sit at.[130]

The meal of the day was rice, greens, salmon, and some gravy. The lady correspondent also observed that the "Centre is something of a social club for these small children. They walk between the tables wondering with whom they will sit and the older children chat and laugh as they shovel food into the babies' mouths".[131] She emphasized the cleanliness of the center, the orderliness of the whole process, and expressed surprise at how well-behaved the children were. The imagery of order and cleanliness, meticulous planning, the presence of science, and a volunteer spirit, were all critical tools against malnutrition and child poverty. Each meal was scientifically "prepared according to the specifications provided by the Professor of Bio-Chemistry of the College of Medicine".[132] That usually translated to a plate of rice, *ikan bilis* (anchovies, usually fried), green vegetables, eggs, and some meat or fish if available, plus milk and fresh fruit.[133] The children's health was monitored regularly. All centers were visited by a team of two female medical doctors. From a sample of about 4,000 children examined upon joining the scheme in 1947, the vast majority were found to be underweight and in poor physical condition. Almost all of them suffered from more than one ailment, including decayed teeth, swollen gums and anemia.[134] A similar survey the following year in 1948 showed slight improvement in addressing malnutrition, but more success in improving the general physical condition of each child.[135]

Health problems were only the tip of a larger social problem. The lady correspondent also observed how several elder siblings managed to eat half, if not all, of their younger

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[130] *The Singapore Free Press*, 3 February 1947, "S'pore's Children Get Fed".
[131] *The Singapore Free Press*, 3 February 1947, "S'pore's Children Get Fed".
[132] *The Second Report*, p. 34. Each meal should ideally supply "the daily requirements of Vitamin A and Iron, 3/4 of the Riboflavin requirement, a little less than 1/2 of the Thiamin (B1) and about 1/3 of the daily requirements of Protein, Calcium, and Vitamin C".
[133] *The Second Report*, p. 34. The specifications given were: 1 oz. lightly milled rice, 1 oz. *kachang hijau* (green peas), 1 oz. fresh *ikan bilis* (salted tiny fish), 1 oz. green leaf vegetable, 1/4 oz. of oil (containing Red Palm Oil), and 1/6 oz. of salt. Every child was also provided with 5 fluid ounces of milk and 3-4 ounces of fresh fruit daily.
[134] *The Second Report*, p. 37. Two medical doctors volunteered their services full-time: Dr. (Mrs.) Gladys Hu and Dr. (Mrs.) Helen Wodak.
[135] *The Third Report*, p. 7.

siblings' meals. Lady McNeice (nee Loke Yuen Peng), wife of Percy McNeice and a volunteer at the Mount Erskine feeding center, recalled "the older brothers and sisters used to come along the centers and look longingly at what was being done for the younger children".[136] There were incidents reported of older children becoming unruly and causing disturbances at certain feeding centers after being denied entry and a meal.[137] Even the term "centers" is a little misleading. The majority of the feeding "centers" were usually no more than gathering points, such as the courtyard or a shed within the premises of someone's home. The larger centers were usually extensions of existing structures such as schools, clinics, and a former motor workshop. In 1947, there were four "static" centers, which increased to sixteen at the end of 1948. Limited funds meant that only children found to be malnourished and from families receiving financial relief or found to be in dire straits were given the meal. Even then, only one child from those families was eligible. Limited resources also meant that the feeding and managing of roughly two hundred children per center rested heavily on volunteers.

The rapid expansion of the child feeding scheme, in the face of such obstacles, was mainly due to a group of volunteers. The volunteers were predominantly female and hailed from different communities.[138] The core group, which was eventually organized into a semi-official voluntary workers' association, was made up of the spouses of British government officials (which included the Governor and Colonial Secretary of Singapore) and the elite of Singapore society. It was initially led by Lady Dorothy Gimson, wife of the Governor of Singapore. Volunteers also came from other sections of Singapore society. Chinese groups came forward offering physical premises, usually part of a school, to help with child feeding. The Singapore Chinese Women's Association operated a feeding center at No. 51 Armenian Street (next to the present day Substation and Peranakan Museum).[139] The Singapore branch of the Women's Federation, a 3,000-strong organization by mid-1947, opened a feeding

[136] Born in 1917 in Kuala Lumpur, Lady McNeice was the youngest daughter of Loke Yew, a prominent businessman and philanthropist in Singapore and Malaya, and the sister of Loke Wan Tho, founder of Cathay Organization. She married McNeice in 1947, and took a keen interest in Singapore's nature conservation and social life. She died in 2012 in Singapore. NAS OHC, Lady Yuen-Peng McNeice. Pioneers of Singapore, Accession Number 000190. Interviewed in 1982. Reel 4 (of 4).
[137] NAS, SCA 5/47. Paper No. 3C "Children's Meal's and Children's Clubs". *The Second Report* (p. 21) cited disturbances by unruly children at some of the centers. Other volunteers recalled the children not attending schools and "running all over the road", (NAS OHC, Gnanasundram Thevathasan, reel 15), and some thought they were like "wild animals" (Huston quoting Constance Goh Kok Kee in *Motherhood by Choice*, p. 59).
[138] *The Third Report*, p. 4. "About 200 women of all races in Singapore: Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian, Arab, Russian, Filippino [sic], American, French, Welsh, Irish, Scots, English, Swedish, Czech, Dutch, Persian...."
[139] *The Singapore Free Press*, 11 September 1947, "Another Child Feeding Centre".

center on the school premises in Ching Guan village, located off Thomson Road,[140] and the Singapore Women's Mutual Aid Association of Victims' Families similarly used part of the premises of Yook Yin School at Sims Avenue.[141] Members of the Malay community also stepped forward, opening up to seven feeding centers that were usually located within their home compounds.[142] The presence of the volunteers introduced a dynamic that was not easily managed by the Social Welfare Department. For instance, two of the Chinese women associations were affiliated with the former Anti-Japanese Army and/or the Malayan Communist Party. In June 1948, the Yook Yin School at Sims Avenue was in danger of "disintegration" after its leaders fled (probably as a result of the Emergency), leaving the women's organization and the feeding center in disarray. The Social Welfare and Education Departments were forced to step in to ensure the feeding center and the school continued running for the time being.[143]

There were more positive outcomes. Unburdened by government bureaucracy and the need to adhere to state policy, the core group of lady volunteers proactively adjusted the approach in the child feeding centers and to the child feeding policy itself. In mid-1947, some feeding centers were already incorporating additional activities to keep the children occupied. They provided lessons in Chinese, English, Malay, sewing, knitting, carpentry, laundry-work, book-binding, arithmetic, physical training, simple hygiene and first aid.[144] Volunteers at certain centers even installed shower baths and raised funds for new clothes. By then, there was sufficient pressure on the government to release more funds for additional cooked meals for children outside the original target group.[145] In 1948, the change was made official, and

[140] The Singapore Women's Federation opened a center next to a Chinese school it was running in Ching Guan village (off Thomson Road) (*The Straits Times*, 16 July 1947, "Feeding Centre"). See also *The Straits Times*, 24 June 1947, "War Has Changed S'pore Women".

[141] *The Straits Times*, 9 August 1947, "Feeding Centre". The association was set up to support the dependents and children of war victims, and had interest in the war crimes trials.

[142] There were at least seven centers ran by the Malay community. See *The Singapore Free Press*, 23 October 1947, "Volunteers Run Feeding Centres". Three of these centers were identified specifically. See *The Straits Times*, 19 April 1947, "Geylang Children Get Free Meals" (center in Geylang Serai); 2 July 1947, "Children's Centre Opened" (center at junction of Buona Vista and West Coast Roads); 6 July 1947, "New Child Feeding Centre at Geylang" (center at Lorong 33, Geylang). For additional information on Geylang Serai center, see *The Singapore Free Press*, 25 June 1947, "Malays flock to feeding centre". The center was located in the home of Ungku Fatimah binte Tungku Abdullah, the granddaughter of "Sultan Ali of Singapore". Most likely meant Sultan Ali of Johor, a descendant of Temenggong Ibrahim. This center was closed in May 1949. (NAS, SCA 4/49. 13 May 1949).

[143] NAS, SCA 6/48. 10 September 1948.

[144] *The Singapore Free Press*, 23 October 1947, "Volunteers Run Feeding Centres". See also NAS, SCA 5/47. Paper No. 3C "Children's Meal's and Children's Clubs"

[145] Up to 25% of registered children at each center. See *The Singapore Free Press*, 5 July 1947, "Singapore's Child Problem". See also NAS, SCA 5/47. Secretary for Social Welfare to Colonial Secretary, 30 May 1947.

all feeding centers became known as Children Social Centres.[146] Rather than the Social Welfare Department, it was Lady Gimson and her fellow lady volunteers who initiated the change. In fact, most if not all of the additional center activities were supported by fund-raisers organized by the volunteers. Mrs. Gnanasundram Thevathsan was a volunteer at the Mount Erskine feeding center, located behind Maxwell market.[147] She recalled:

> We used to collect these children from this roadside or children who played in the streets. Because soon after the war, schools were just beginning to open. Those who were educated, who could afford, sent them to school, whereas all these children from the village, from poorer home, they just spent their time in the streets. So we collected these children and gave them one good meal a day and taught them a little bit of English, Maths, handwork, things like that.[148]

Not knowing a word of Chinese, she had to innovate ways to communicate to the children using physical objects and sign language.[149] She also described the general situation of the children and their families:

> Because [the parents] were already finding it so hard to feed these children. They had to go and work, both mother and father. When the mother, father go and work outside, the children are left on the road. Some met in accident, some got into bad habits, some started stealing, joining groups to steal and that kind of things.[150]

The Singapore Family Planning Association

The daily sight of large numbers of hungry, malnourished children, and the inability to feed and care for every single one of them made a fundamental impact. Confronted with poverty and its implications on a daily basis, volunteers began doing more than just feeding children. Mrs. Thevathasan also recalled got together with other volunteers to give "scholarships" to some of the children to attend a "good proper school". Soon, some even begun thinking beyond fund-raising for club activities, additional meals, and education needs,

[146] Announced at a Social Welfare Council meeting, and publicly in 1948. NAS, SCA 6/48. 16 November 1948.
[147] Born in Ceylon in 1920, Mrs. Gnanasundram Thevathasan arrived in Singapore with her doctor-husband in 1940. She became active in social and community work after the war, partly because of her participation in activities organized by Wesley Methodist Church. She was made a Justice of the Peace, and was active in the Y.W.C.A. Her oral history is available in NAS OHC, Mrs Gnanasundram Thevathasan. Communities of Singapore (Part 2). Accession Number 000345. Interviewed in 1983. Hear also Myra Cresson's oral history. NAS OHC, Cresson, Myra Isabelle (Mrs). Project: Women Through the Years: Economic & Family Lives. Accession Number 000594. Interviewed in 1985. Reel 9 (of 12).
[148] NAS OHC, Thevathasan, reel 15.
[149] NAS OHC, Thevathasan, reel 16.
[150] NAS OHC, Thevathasan, reel 16.

to tackling the root causes of the poverty they see every day. Lady McNeice traced the catalyst for change to the feeding centers:

> When these older children were also brought in, I think, some of us women voluntary workers realized that something had to be done about limiting the families. And that, you know, quality was better than quantity. And so, that started the idea of family planning.[151]

A dedicated approach to family planning began in early 1949. In February, a Municipal Health Officer spoke out, stating that there was a "crying need for scientific family planning". In the course of her work, Dr. Maggie Lim encountered dozens of mothers seeking help at the Municipal welfare clinics, including a "38-year-old Chinese woman who had had 18 pregnancies, and labourers' wives with families of six or seven children whom they could not afford to feed or clothe adequately".[152] Her daughter recalled her mother encountering "[t]ime and again, women drained by childbirth or poverty [begging] her to buy the newborn infant they could not hope to support. Over and again she faced the consequences of botched abortions".[153] In April, her colleague, Dr. Mary Tan, warned of numerous "families in Singapore ... who were infecting their babies with such dreaded disease as syphilis, and others who were handing down diseases like insanity, haemophelia [sic] and idiocy". She saw such types of children "every day" and highlighted the "hundreds of poor Singapore mothers ... who were driven on the verge of desperation and exhaustion by the bearing of children every year".[154] The following month in May, McNeice made public his support for family planning, based on the Social Welfare Department's daily dealings with cases of child malnutrition, juvenile delinquency, family irresponsibility and neglect.[155]

The Municipal lady doctors had been involved in the original version of the child feeding scheme during the British Military Administration. As they held official positions in

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[151] NAS OHC, Lady McNeice, reel 4.

[152] *The Straits Times*, 23 February 1949, "Crying Need for Family Planning". A direct descendant of Tan Tock Seng, Maggie Lim (nee Tan) (b. 1913) was the first schoolgirl in Singapore to win the Queen's Scholarship in 1930. She returned to Singapore in 1940 to work as a public health officer. She was camp doctor to the Endau Settlement during the occupation. After the war, she resumed her work in the Singapore Municipality, specializing in maternity and child health. She was the vanguard of voluntary and later official efforts for family planning. When she retired, she was a Professor for a time at the East West Center, University of Hawai'i. She died in California in 1995 and was inducted in the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame in 2014. Information taken from http://www.swhf.sg/the-inductees/18-health/153-maggie-lim. Accessed 5 July 2015.

[153] Quoted in June Lee, "Rooted in Service: Legacies of a Family of Old Rafflesians", in *Rafflesian Times*, 15 August 2013. https://rafflesiantimes.wordpress.com/2013/08/15/rooted-in-service-legacies-of-a-family-of-old-rafflesians/. Accessed 5 July 2015.

[154] *The Straits Times*, 5 April 1949, "Call for Birth Control Will Not Break Up Marriages". Talk was delivered by Dr. Mary Tan.

[155] *The Singapore Free Press*, 26 April 1949, "Many Parents Don't Care"

the Municipality, their very public comments sparked off a controversy that played out in public, stoked even more with a proposed bill to allow family planning advice at services at Municipal welfare clinics. The build up to the debate was fiery. Representing the Roman Catholic Church, the Bishop of Malacca spoke out, pressuring Municipal Commissioners who were Catholic.[156] The Catholic Young Men's Association also held a special rally to speak out against the bill.[157] The Progressive Party, the party in control of the Municipal Commission, lifted the whip, which was a good thing too as its members were split along religious lines.[158]Support for the bill was generally based on social and economic considerations, such as overcrowded housing, physical hardships, and disease. Opposition was based on religious and moral grounds. One of those against was Yap Pheng Geck, who opposed the bill on the basis that family planning was "an intimately personal matter beyond the pale of central authority.... There should be no official advocacy of it".[159] Yap's arguments were interesting as they seemingly contradict his earlier support for state involvement in social welfare. On 27 May 1949, after a three-hour heated debate, in front of a packed gallery (that was mostly women), the bill was eventually passed, with twelve commissioners supporting, ten against, and three abstaining.[160] Still, there were limits imposed. Family planning advice was made available at three of the five Municipal clinics, but only once a week for a couple of hours.[161]

A parallel plan was however gaining momentum. At a public talk on 16 May 1949, in front of a women-dominated audience, McNeice (supposedly in his personal capacity) proposed a family planning association.[162] There was no immediate action taken after, perhaps waiting to see the outcome of the Municipal Commission debate. Incidentally, in June, a royal commission in Britain recommended family planning advice should be a duty of the National Health Service.[163] The Singapore Family Planning Association was officially inaugurated on 22 July 1949. McNeice was elected as President, and the wife of the Colonial Secretary installed as Patron.[164] Progress was slow as the new voluntary organization relied

[156] *The Singapore Free Press*, 9 May 1949, "Freedom to Choose", and *The Straits Times*, 7 May 1949, "Clinics for The Married".
[157] *The Straits Times*, 26 May 1949, "600 Listen to Case Against Birth Control".
[158] *The Singapore Free Press*, 9 May 1949, "Freedom to Choose".
[159] *The Straits Times*, 20 May 1949, Improper Subject' In Public; *The Straits Times*, 28 May 1949, "Majority Vote for Birth Control".
[160] *The Straits Times*, 28 May 1949, "Majority Vote for Birth Control". It was a plurality, rather than the majority reported, as three commissioners (all apparently from the Malay-Muslim community) abstained.
[161] *The Singapore Free Press*, 3 November 1949, "Family planning: 3 new clinics".
[162] *The Straits Times*, 17 May 1949, 60 Women Vote for Family Planning
[163] *The Straits Times*, 21 June 1949, "Royal Commission Recommends Family Planning for Britain".
[164] *The Straits Times*, 23 July 1949, "Family Planning Assn. Formed".

almost exclusively on support from the public, and a token annual grant from the government. Four family planning clinics were opened at the end of 1949, in addition to the three Municipal clinics already offering family planning advice.

There had been little public discussion of family planning in Singapore before 1949.[165] But it had been on the boil since volunteers started helping out at the various child feeding centers in 1947. Behind this seemingly sudden outburst was a group of lady volunteers led by Constance Goh Kok Kee (nee Wee Sai Poh), the principal volunteer at the first child feeding center at Havelock Road.[166] A close friend remembered Sai Poh as a person who was "absolutely outspoken, absolutely determined that large families were bad for mothers, who were unhealthy due to frequent pregnancies; bad for the children because there were too many of them and not enough money to go around.... She had a sense of social rightness".[167] Sai Poh had the imagination to go along with her gumption. She was one of several volunteers who enabled the first child feeding center at Havelock Road to open in January 1947. To raise funds to feed an additional fifty children who did not qualify for the feeding scheme, she and a fellow volunteer organized a "mahjong party" which raised $4,000.[168] Before long, the Havelock Road center, housed in a former motor workshop, even had a laundry, toilets and showers for the children.

Just as she was responsible for opening the first child feeding center, Sai Poh opened the first Association clinic in November 1949, on the premises of her doctor-husband's clinic along South Bridge Road.[169] McNeice might have been founding President, but Sai Poh was the significant figure behind the scenes. McNeice candidly recalled:

> [I]t was Mrs. Goh Kok Kee who approached me with some other women to start a family planning association. I ... frankly it wasn't my own idea and it wasn't anything that I was particularly interested in at all.... She was the person

[165] See Saw Swee Hock, *Population Policies and Programmes in Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), p. 7.
[166] Born in Xiamen, China, in 1906, Constance Wee Sai Poh moved to Singapore in 1918. Raised a Presbyterian, she furthered her education in Shanghai Baptist College in 1924, taking an assorted mix of social science courses. Those courses exposed her, via home and factory visits, to the industrial exploitation and urban poverty of very young girls working in silk factories. After five semesters, she returned to Singapore, along with her new name "Constance", and trained to be a teacher, eventually qualifying in 1930. She married Dr. Goh Kok Kee, a health officer in the colonial government, in 1932 in Penang. They spent the remainder of the 1930s in Kuantan, Pahang, until the Japanese invasion forced them to retreat to Singapore seeking refuge. Information taken from Zhou Mei, *The Life of Family Planning Pioneer, Constance Goh: A Point of Light* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1996), and Perdita Huston, *Motherhood by Choice: Pioneers in Women's Health and Family Planning* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York: Distributed by the Talman Co., 1992).
[167] Huston, *Motherhood by Choice*, p. 65.
[168] *The Straits Times*, 11 June 1947, "New Plan for Poor Children".
[169] *The Straits Times*, 5 November 1949, "First FPA Clinic Is Opened". On that day, the clinic only had one lady visitor, who was immediately fussed over by six volunteers. Zhou, *Constance Goh*, p. 136.

> who talked me into it, yes…. She said that we needed somebody who was in an official position to start this off. And she said it wasn't easy to get a government officer who would be prepared to take the responsibility of holding this meeting. I don't think it was a great responsibility but she still think that it was. Anyway it was she who persuaded me to hold this meeting and that was how the whole thing started.[170]

In Sai Poh's own words, echoing the thoughts of her fellow volunteers: "Children were running wild; if parents could not feed those they already had, how could they add more to the family?"[171] In the course of her work at the child feeding center, Sai Poh witnessed first-hand starving children, most riddled with disease, their siblings whom the volunteers were unable to feed all, and their desperate mothers. "It was seeing all the poverty of those post-war months that convinced us that something had to be done about family planning…. Family planning was…to allow women to space and limit the size of their families".[172] The problems confronting the new voluntary organization were deeply entrenched. Lady McNeice spoke of her helplessness when encountering certain cases:

> I must say that in coming into contact with these women and hearing about their problems, one felt extremely sorry for them; that one couldn't help them. Those who already had, say ten or twelve children, one couldn't help them, when they came to us and they were already pregnant and about to have another child, one couldn't help them not to have that child. It was not our policy to encourage abortion. And in those days, no woman could be sterilized until she had had seven children. The doctors couldn't do it and were not allowed to do it.[173]

The need for family planning was clear to Mrs. Thevathasan from her experiences at the child feeding center. Her impression was blunt and to the point: "And people were just breeding. Chinese families, Indian families, they have so many children in one family, they can't afford to feed or cloth [or] send them to school".[174] She recollected the hopelessness of certain situations encountered:

> I used to meet these young girls and the men. One moment you see her expecting, and the next moment you see her with the baby. And after a year and soon after, she's carrying again. And I used to tell her, "How can you

[170] NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 15. McNeice was quoted more pithily by Sai Poh's biographer: "She bullied me into it". Zhou, *Constance Goh*, p. 142.
[171] Huston, *Motherhood by Choice*, p. 59.
[172] Huston, *Motherhood by Choice*, p. 60.
[173] NAS OHC, Lady McNeice, reel 4.
[174] NAS OHC, Thevathasan, reel 16.

> expect another child?" She said, "What to do" she would say…. Sometimes, the women did not want the additional children, and asked for abortion options.[175]

She could only advise against abortion as the mother might lose her life and her children would be vulnerable as a result.

It was not easy for the new Association. It did have tacit support from the colonial government, primarily in the form of annual monetary grants. The running of the association was heavily reliant on volunteers in the early years, hence its outreach was limited by the time volunteers could put in.[176] Opposition came from all sections of society, such as religion, husbands, some mothers, and parents, and sometimes even in the least expected places. In 1950, the Association opened a clinic in Kandang Kerbau Hospital, a significant moment as it was the main maternity and children's hospital in Singapore.[177] However, Lady McNeice recalled some of the hospital nurses actively working against them.[178] McNeice commented that the "nurses who were Roman Catholic were advised by the priests to ... they mustn't assist in anyway and in fact if they were asked to assist in anyway, they must refuse on moral ground".[179]

The Roman Catholic Church was the Association's most vocal opposition. Sai Poh recalled, with some mirth, how a priest apparently condemned Sai Poh to hell, about "twice a month".[180] Maggie Lim, as a result of her volunteering her medical expertise at the association clinics, was also condemned to hell for "... wickedness in interfering with nature", and stood "accused of corrupting the young and scheming to depopulate the earth".[181] Members of the Association worked hard and smart. Sai Poh recalled apportioning to her comrades the task of reading the main religious texts, so as to defend and fortify the family planning movement against religious opposition.[182] Moreover, every year when the budget (in

[175] NAS OHC, Thevathasan, reel 16.
[176] Funny anecdote of a volunteer nurse leaving halfway "in the midst of inserting a cap" to make another appointment. Sai Poh had to don gloves, put on a brave face, and completed the messy procedure she had hitherto no experience with. The main contraceptive device then was the Dutch pessary, an early diaphragm, or more crudely, the "cap-and-paste" method. See Zhou, *Constance Goh*, pp. 139 and 143.
[177] *The Straits Times*, 5 October 1950, "At Kandang Kerbau"; *The Straits Times*, 29 September 1950, "F.P.A. Service at K.K. Hospital".
[178] NAS OHC, Lady McNeice, reel 4. Resistance could have taken the form of deliberate misinformation regarding the clinic's opening hours. See *The Straits Times*, 24 March 1951, "F.P.A. Hours at the K.K. Clinic".
[179] NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 15.
[180] Quoted in Huston, *Motherhood by Choice*, p. 60, and Zhou, *Constance Goh*, pp. 133-134. A Methodist herself, Sai Poh was extremely dismissive of the Catholic Church, once describing it as preaching "pay, pray and obey".
[181] Quoted in Lee, "Rooted in Service: Legacies of a Family of Old Rafflesians". Accessed 5 July 2015.
[182] Zhou, *Constance Goh*, pp. 134-135, and Huston, *Motherhood by Choice*, p. 60.

which a grant for the Association was provided) for the colony came up for debate, there was no guarantee that the annual grant would continue. Lady McNeice recalled having "to lobby the Legislative Councilors … to either support us when this matter was brought up in Council, or, at least, to abstain from voting against us".[183] That the annual grants increased to a high of $120,000 in 1958 was a testament to the association's efforts.[184] The grants also indicated official recognition of a colony-wide problem with social, economic and political implications. By the late 1950s however, lobbying efforts, coupled with the increasing awareness of the implications of unchecked population growth on Singapore's economy and society, began to change official and religious minds.[185]

It is interesting to read that publicity efforts by the association had to done on the quiet so as to avoid too strident a backlash.[186] This could have referred mainly to the initial stages, when information about clinics were done by word of mouth (due to illiteracy), and the volunteers were still feeling their way around. Sai Poh observed during the early days:

> The news spread by word of mouth. Few women could read. And we dared not say too much: we never had any publicity because if it was known we would be accused of trying to thrust something at other women, having nothing to do, or trying to get jobs. That was the attitude of the men, the public. So we worked quietly undercover. It caught on gradually. We wanted to create the climate for government to accept us, for people to think that we were doing good things for others.[187]

However, after the first family planning clinics were established, a cursory scan of *The Singapore Free Press* and *The Straits Times* issues showed an increasingly vocal organization, either announcing new clinics, their opening hours, appealing for volunteers and donations, or responding to public jibes. The Association also disseminated information through printed materials, though there is not much information on circulation numbers.[188]

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[183] NAS OHC, Lady McNeice, reel 4.
[184] Saw, *Population policies*, Table 2.1, p. 11.
[185] The 1957 and 1958 annual FPA reports included respectively short articles by Goh Keng Swee (Director for Social Welfare), and Francis Thomas (Labour Front's Minister for Communication and Works), both of which pointed out the problems of Singapore's high population growth rate. The 1958 FPA annual report also included messages of goodwill and support from the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church, and the Chief Kathi of Singapore (representing the Islamic faith). Annual reports, publicity materials, and correspondence can be found in the NAS under the Public Relations Office (microfilm no. PRO 11, file reference 419/54: Family Planning Association, Singapore), and under the Wellcome Library collection (SA/FPA/A21/19 and SA/FPA/A21/28: Singapore Family Planning Association). The NUS Central and Medical Libraries have the reports from 1960.
[186] The impression was given in Mark R. Frost and Yu-Mei Balasingamchow, *Singapore: A Biography*, p. 337.
[187] Huston, *Motherhood by Choice*, p. 61.
[188] In *Constance Goh* (pp. 149-150), Zhou Mei describes two examples of publicity materials, one an actual demonstration kit on how to insert the cap properly, and another an illustrated booklet entitled *A Dream That*

Presumably such materials would have been personally given to women attending the clinics. As more women visited the clinics, most times in secret, the Association shared more desperate stories. A contributor to *The Straits Times* challenged those who disparaged the new organization:

> Let those who oppose birth control step over to one of the F.P.A. Clinics in Singapore and see for themselves. They will see young mothers with six to 10 children, and older mothers with 12 to 20 children, who are already grandmothers but are still giving birth to unwanted babies, simply because they can see no way out. Their pathetic stories would surely change the minds of the birth control opponents.[189]

Sai Poh was especially vocal when she was President between 1950 and 1951. She did not hold back when describing situations women found themselves in:

> In one of the other clinics where similar assistance is available, a woman who had had 22 pregnancies begged the doctors "to do something to stop it all". She had 20 children. Her husband was unemployed.[190]

> About three-quarters of the 650 babies born in Singapore each week are born to women who live in the cubicles of Chinatown – the poorest class and the one least able to feed, clothe and educate large families…. It is pathetic to see how grateful the women are to be taught. If only we had known about it earlier is their constant cry.[191]

She also took aim at polygamy, decrying the "custom in Singapore of keeping two families running at the same time…." She shared one case where a forty-one-year-old woman, who has had seventeen children, found out her husband took on a younger wife – even though he was incapable of supporting his existing family.[192] Husbands were one primary source of resistance. Sai Poh recalled an irate husband tossing out the contraceptive apparatus his wife had earlier obtained, and of another "particularly off-hand" husband who reassured his wife – mother of eight children – that additional children could be given away. There was precedence, as the latter couple had already given two away.[193] Such resistance was deeply entrenched in social and cultural norms, and hence difficult to eradicate overnight. Sai Poh bitingly summed up men's general attitude:

Can Come True?!, available in English and Chinese first, and later Tamil. The latter can be seen in the Wellcome Library collection in the NAS.

[189] *The Straits Times*, 10 December 1949, "And this is what a woman thinks".

[190] *The Singapore Free Press*, 3 May 1950, "Desperate' Mothers Seek Aid".

[191] *The Straits Times*, 20 June 1951, "These Women Are Grateful".

[192] *The Singapore Free Press*, 27 May 1950, "Polygamy is a Problem".

[193] *The Singapore Free Press*, 27 May 1950, "Polygamy is a Problem".

> It was very difficult to persuade men to use condoms. Most men thought only of their own pleasure. They thought their fun might be spoiled, their health injured. The worship of ancestors influenced their attitudes as well. You must have sons to provide for you in the after-life and to carry on the family name, to serve you. The daughters get married and go away. It is the sons who remain and if you don't have sons you must try again and again. Many times their wives had to come to us in secret.[194]

The Family Planning Association was not alone in its fight for better family planning and birth control. In 1951, Kathleen Hickley's feature articles laid bare, in graphic detail, the more extreme social consequences of the inability to support large families:

> It is because parents are vainly trying to support too large a family on too little money. Ah Meng's mother would not have let her baby go if she had been the second child born to her. Lee Song would have had a better chance of throwing off tubercular germs if this parents had been able to provide better nourishment for him.[195]

She was not alone. Charles Gamba, an economist in the University of Malaya, wrote in support of Hickley's scathing exposé and to defend her against naysayers. Gamba highlighted an underlying absence of pride, and by relation, a lack of ownership and will to improve Singapore society. The Family Planning Association was not the only organization slowed by a lackadaisical attitude:

> SATA fights for existence and must rely on mere pittances, FPA is short of funds, hospitals are overcrowded yet the last Budget vetoed additions, school building has been cut down, Social welfare workers must 'walk' their rounds from one end of Singapore to the other, cubicle life does not bear describing, the price of rice has been allowed to go up regardless of the effect on the lower income group, 'tea' or key money is still being extorted, the rent racket is in full swing, prostitutes of fourteen years of age are common and there is an approximate incidence of congenital VD in babies at the rate of 120 per annum (12 per 100,000 of population. The rate in England and Wales (1947) being only 0.8).[196]

By then, the child feeding scheme, and its original rationale of providing a meal per day for each child (ideally), had been eviscerated by cost-cutting. In 1948, child feeding centers became social centers, taking into account a broader range of activities on top of

[194] Huston, *Motherhood by Choice*, p. 61.
[195] *The Straits Times*, 16 December 1951, "This is One Answer to a Great Problem".
[196] *The Straits Times*, 23 December 1951, Sunday Times Postbag [By Charles Gamba, Dept. of Economics, University of Malaya]

feeding and nutrition. In the same year, there was a discernible drop in the number of children below school age attending the centers, from over 750,000 to just below 500,000. On the other hand, the number of children aged seven and above did increase as the primary rationale of the child feeding scheme shifted. It should be noted too that in August 1948, the Social Welfare Department ceased its communal feeding program, leaving only one central kitchen to continue supporting the children centers and other institutions in need of food.[197] Volunteers were also difficult to come by. The more active volunteers were the spouses of the British colonial officials, but as the latter were periodically transferred, the core group of lady volunteers was also diluted. The number of feeding centers was quietly reduced from a high of twenty-four to about sixteen by the end of 1948.[198]

The Social Welfare Department's report for 1948 started off with a passionate defense of the scheme.[199] This was likely in response to subtle opposition to the concept of child feeding by the state. As early as September 1947, a query was raised during a Social Welfare Council meeting about food wastage in the feeding centers.[200] Similar queries were again raised in 1948 by the same individual, but now more clearly positing that child feeding should be the responsibility of parents, and "not of the Government".[201] Even the Commissioner for Labour thought a permanent child feeding scheme, along with other "attractive" social welfare features, would not be in Singapore's best interests.[202]

The penny finally dropped in November 1949. The Legislative Council approved funding that only allowed the scheme to continue operations for six months in 1950 and at the same time requested a committee to look into the viability of the scheme.[203] Public response, in the form of "wild speculation and accusations" that the decision was taken to avoid increasing taxes, was apparently bothersome enough for a Legislative Councilor to urge the

[197] Meals were also provided to children in five orphanages and two creches. NAS, SCA 179/50. Report of the Committee to Investigate the Child Feeding Scheme, p. 3.
[198] *The Third Report*, p. 9.
[199] *The Third Report*, pp. 6-8. The report hinted at (but did not elaborate on) criticisms of the child feeding scheme: "He is certainly a short-sighted individual who attempts to decry an efficient and well-conducted feeding scheme because it does not produce spectacular results". The report was published in 1949.
[200] NAS, SCA 5/47. 19 September 1947.
[201] NAS, SCA 6/48. 13 February 1948. Yap Pheng Geck defended the scheme, while Constance Goh, present on the Council as a representative of the YWCA, invited the inquirer to visit her Havelock Road feeding center.
[202] NAS, SCA 6/48. 16 November 1948. Related, Gomez, when asked why he did not want to return to Kerala, India, cited the better (and free) services he had in Singapore. Coelho, "Old man on public assistance", p. 56.
[203] *The Straits Times*, 16 November 1949, "Axe May Fall on Feeding Schemes". The Legislative Council also made inquiries into the Five-Year Plan, with a view to "make economies" in the proposed $750,000 building projects for homes, approved school and the rural settlement. See *The Straits Times*, 20 December 1949, "Scotching a Rumour".

committee be convened as soon as possible.[204] The committee was given its terms of reference in March 1950, and completed its inquiry in July.[205] While acknowledging the health and social benefits of the scheme thus far, the committee's report gives the impression it was tasked not to inquire into the scheme's validity, but to make economies as and where possible. Appendices to the report focused exclusively on cost savings. Costing eight cents per meal, compared to the previous fifteen cents per cooked meal, the new version was unmistakably much cheaper. The concept of providing a free nutritious meal a day to children was quietly adjusted to a supplementary feeding scheme. The former was deliberately designed to provide a third of a child's daily nutrition requirements, while the latter merely supplemented the family's daily diet.[206] In place of a cooked meal, a "snack" was to be provided, in the form of a yeast biscuit, fruits and a cocoa-mix drink. Claims the new "snack" was more nutritious were moreover not substantiated, at least not in the detail as the earlier meal had been.[207]

The timing of the cost-cutting measure coincided with the establishment of the Family Planning Association. It also came at the tail-end of a public controversy over birth control and state involvement in personal affairs. It would not have been difficult to connect the key advocates of the association and their ties to the child feeding centers. Did opponents of the Family Planning Association attack it through the child feeding scheme? Possible, but there were other mitigating circumstances. In 1949, the Singapore government was attempting to reduce a deficit without necessarily increasing taxes.[208] By then, the year-old Malayan Emergency was also beginning to stretch the resources of the British government, limiting its capabilities to send aid.[209] Indeed, Britain's own economy was severely weakened by the war and postwar recovery costs, leading to the devaluation of the British pound in 1949. That had ramifications for its colonial territories. The child feeding scheme was not the only social welfare project to come into the cost-cutter's radar. Capital projects from the Social Welfare

[204] *The Singapore Free Press,* 14 December 1949, "'Wild Talk' About Child Feeding".
[205] NAS, SCA 179/50. Report of the Committee to Investigate the Child Feeding Scheme.
[206] *The Straits Times*, 14 September 1950, "Welfare Snacks Will Continue".
[207] The section on child feeding and the children's clubs in the SWDAR for 1950 was relatively subdued compared to earlier reports for 1947 and 1948. There were no details of the nutritional value of the new snack.
[208] *The Singapore Free Press*, 15 November 1949, "No Increase in Singapore Taxation".
[209] Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 200. Citing earlier studies, Harper observed the cost of fighting the Emergency peaked in 1953 at $250-$270 million (Malayan dollars), not including another $100 million spent on police and military forces and an additional $30 million spent by the tin industry protecting itself. At the end of 1948, the Emergency cost between $250,000 and $300,000 per day. It cost the Malayan government an estimated $93 million for the whole of 1949. See Richard Stubbs, *Counter-Insurgency and The Economic Factor: The Impact of the Korean War Prices Boom on the Malayan Emergency* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1974), p. 7.

Department's Five-Year Plan, such as new buildings for an approved school, a girl's home and a rural settlement, were also being studied with a view to reduce costs.[210]

The Family Planning Association met a pressing social need from its inception, particularly throughout the 1950s and early 1960s when state presence in this very personal matter was relatively absent. As the sole agency dedicated to family planning and birth control in postwar Singapore (until 1966), the Family Planning Association was responsible for arresting and reducing Singapore's fertility rate from 1958.[211] The strains of running a voluntary organization took its toll, as resources were stretched to the limits. In 1957 and 1958, McNeice, re-elected as President, made appeals to government to take over the family planning clinics and to be more directly involved in a task that had far-reaching implications for Singapore's society and economy.[212] The Labour Front government (1955-1959) did not acquiesce, though its Education Minister was fully aware of the astronomical costs in building more schools and hiring more teachers if something was not done to arrest the fertility rate.[213] The People's Action Party government was more receptive, acknowledging in its 1959 manifesto its support for family planning.[214]

But despite official patronage of the Association (including then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew opening an international family planning conference in 1963), it was not until 1966 that an official population policy was adopted. A Singapore Family Planning and Population Board was created and public campaigns to limit family size began. For McNeice, the benefits of state involvement in family planning were clear: "… [B]ecause as a volunteer organization, we could never do things that government had done… [And] once government took it over, they were able to put in anything that they like and run the clinics wherever they like.[215] The Family Planning Association did, with the colonial government's blessing, open a clinic in Kandang Kerbau Hospital as early as 1950. But the underlying sentiment of McNeice's recollections is clear. Government could, and eventually did, execute policy on a much broader scale compared to a voluntary organization with limited resources.

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[210] Long-term plans for expanding education and medical facilities were also similarly frustrated by cost-cutting measures. See various annual reports for Education and Medical Departments.
[211] In 1966, the PAP government took over all FPA clinics, and about 90% of the FPA's work. Saw, *Population Policy*, Table 8.1, p. 115, and pp. 20-21.
[212] *The Singapore Free Press*, 10 May 1958, "Heading for Disaster", and *The Straits Times*, 6 September 1958, "Birth Control: A Task for The Govt.", and FPA annual reports quoted in Saw, *Population Policy*, pp. 11-12.
[213] *The Straits Times*, 16 December 1958, "Education: A $975 Million Bill in 10 Years If...". See also *The Singapore Free Press*, 16 December 1958, "Chew: Where is Money Coming from?" The Legislative Assembly was debating the continuation of the annual grant to the FPA.
[214] A strong connection between the two was the late Kwa Geok Choo, wife of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first Prime Minister, was Vice-President of the FPA in 1960.
[215] NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 15.

The first organization of its kind in Singapore and Southeast Asia, the Family Planning Association was a regional and international leader. In 1952, the Family Planning Association became a founding member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), with Singapore acting as the base for its Southeast Asia Regional Headquarters. It acted as a guide and mentor for similar association from around Southeast Asia, hosting visits and educational workshops for sister branches.[216] McNeice felt the Association was ahead of its time. He shared an anecdote that illustrated a striking difference between Singapore and England:

> One of the interesting things about it is this: when I went on leave one year…, I was asked if I would go and visit the family planning center in England.... And we drove around and I couldn't find this place. I had the address, alright; I mean simply couldn't find this place…. And afterwards I asked the people who ran this place, why it was that I couldn't find it. And he said, "Oh well, we don't have the sign out you know, it is really hush-hush. We don't advertise this!" Well, at this time in Singapore we were putting our signs anywhere. And we weren't ashamed of what we were doing at all. But even in England at that time, family planning was something you couldn't really talk about too loudly.[217]

Lady McNeice was likewise surprised to hear that family planning was illegal in certain states in a supposedly "very liberal and free democracy like the United States (where women had so much freedom) ...."[218] From here, it can be tempting to use the Family Planning Association and its work as an example of false dichotomies between East and West, or between metropole and colony, or even as some form of "history from below" or "people's history". Those approaches do, without doubt, have merit. But in applying them, they should not dilute the historical circumstances that led to establishment of the Family Planning Association in the first place. The impetus came, innocently enough, from a state policy to tackle malnutrition by providing a nutritious meal per day to children in need. It began with volunteers and Social Welfare Department officials making do with what they had, in a disused motor workshop along Havelock Road, courtyards and sheds in private homes in Arab Street, Geylang Serai and Bouna Vista, and spaces in schools and clinics at Prinsep Street, Thomson Road and Sims Avenue. It was a movement that emerged from daily contact with poverty, disease, neglect and wretched despair, such as:

[216] NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 15.
[217] NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 15.
[218] NAS OHC, Lady McNeice, reel 4. She was recounting a conversation with Margaret Sanger, the American pioneer activist for birth control, when the latter visited Singapore.

> Ah Ping ... [who] cannot remember a mother, and his father died last year. At eight years old he was living on the streets - sleeping on the five-foot ways, begging a meal where he could. No one seemed to want Ah Ping, dirty, wild-eyed little vagrant, and fast learning to be a petty thief.[219]

The inability to feed all children imbued in several volunteers a strong sense of mission to address the fundamental cause of social problems, that is having more children than the means to care for them. The movement was then driven and kept alive by the imagination of the volunteers, and at times by their sheer cheek and willpower (particularly from Sai Poh).[220] Hickley had lamented the absence of a sense of civic responsibility (in relation to preventing child cruelty):

> I mentioned last week the crying need for a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. At the moment this is "nobody's business". It was also nobody's business in Britain until some-one made it his business, and last year more than 10,000 people voluntarily sought help from the N.S.P.C.C. It is the public who need help in these matters, and in the last resort it is up to the public to help themselves.[221]

The initial rationale for a child nutrition policy was clear and straightforward. The complicating variable was the presence of lady volunteers who were willing to take action to redress social ills. Simply put, Sai Poh and her fellow volunteers made family planning their business.

A Social Welfare State... Independence and beyond

This chapter has explored some of the impact of an official presence in social welfare in late colonial Singapore. It outlines the uneven effects of policy implementation and in doing so, illustrates the limits of a top-down policy. The Social Welfare Council did not meet the objectives laid down in the wartime policy directive. It was on the whole inert, stifled partly by individual goals and overshadowed partly by a new Social Welfare Department. Hence, efforts to introduce a less state-involved social service organization were initially frustrating. But the pay-off was perhaps worth it, as the new Singapore Council of Social

[219] *The Straits Times*, 1 April 1948, "3,000 Free Meals a Day". By Susan Scott Skirving. Ah Ping was accepted into one of the child centers, and reportedly more adjusted after a couple of weeks.
[220] Sai Poh was officially recognized for her efforts. She was awarded the MBE in 1951, became Honorary Secretary / Regional Chairman of the Far East and Australian Region in 1959 (till 1969), and was named Patron of the IPPF in 1977. She died in 1996, and was inducted in the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame in 2014.
[221] *The Straits Times*, 16 December 1951, "This is one answer to a great problem".

Service represented better and more accurately the breadth and depth of social service agencies in Singapore. It was moreover proactive in advancing social services for the long term and meeting short-term emergency needs.

At the other end of the policymaking spectrum was the Family Planning Association. An unintended outcome of a child nutrition policy, the Association was established predominantly through the will of a few lady volunteers, driven by their firsthand experiences with child poverty. Its development did not require much direction from the state, though tacit official support (via annual grants) ensured legitimacy for the new organization during its early years. Finally, to properly implement the social welfare policy and the work it entailed, trained social workers were required. Initially, the Colonial Development and Welfare fund and other scholarships helped sent promising locals overseas for professional studies. The need for social workers with a familiarity with local conditions, coupled with the movement towards self-government, gave additional impetus for a local social work school.

The successors of these three institutions are still part of a social welfare state in contemporary Singapore, as the National Council of Social Service (renamed in 1992), the Singapore Planned Parenthood Association (renamed in 1986) and the Department of Social Work (established as a stand-alone university department in 2006 after several changes in scope and nomenclature since 1966). Including the Social Welfare Department, each in their own way buttressed the newly independent republic after 9 August 1965. The circumstances surrounding political separation heightened feelings of economic and social vulnerability, particularly so when colonial-era social problems, such as high population growth, inadequate social and economic infrastructure, and internal ethnic strife, remained unresolved at the time of independence. But at least the institutions, structures, and work processes of the social welfare state were in place and fully functional, staffed and maintained by a diverse group of individuals.

CHAPTER 6. A BIOGRAPHY OF STATE-BUILDING

A social welfare state, defined by the institutions, structures, and work processes that provide and support social services, had been established by the time of independence, and continued thereafter. A change in identity from Malaysian to Singaporean did not fundamentally affect social needs whenever one was sick, got injured, became unemployed, or grew old. The development of the social welfare state in Singapore was unavoidably affected by the layered processes of decolonization and political change. But ultimately, their histories moved to rhythms underpinned by deeper lying social structures that are the evolving individual and family needs at various life stages. Such histories are more than narratives of social policy or even social histories of need. They are necessary precursors to a thorough historical examination of the transformation of Singapore society, from a transient society with diverse loyalties, to one that (ideally) shares the responsibility for the well-being of all in the community.

Still, written histories sometimes have the unintended effect of smoothening rough edges, particularly if the historian's attention had been drawn more to moments and personalities pre-identified as "significant". One such rough edge in establishing a social welfare department, and social welfare as part of government work, was the need for staff, preferably those with experience and knowledge of welfare work. This was in many ways a big ask in the years immediately following the return of the British. Social welfare was a new government function. In the context of traditional government functions and the immediate needs of rehabilitation, the new addition meant a further division of revenue and resources. Moreover, where could one find staff members with the requisite expertise and experience to help the social welfare department carry out its functions?

Many who joined the Social Welfare Department or the almoner's service had no prior experience of social welfare work, and had little inkling of what "social welfare" meant – other than rendering assistance during times of need. The early staff of the Social Welfare Department was a hotchpotch of personalities and experience. Percy McNeice and Tom Cromwell (and most of the other expatriates) were colonial administrative officers, trained primarily to handle Chinese affairs. Several were from prewar government departments, like Goh Keng Swee, Woon Wah Siang, and Monie Sundram who were from the War Tax Department. (Before that, Goh was a tutor in Raffles College, while the other two were teachers). Others came from varied backgrounds. Toh Mah Keong was a surveyor-

draughtsman with the Shell Company before he joined the Social Welfare Department in early 1949 as a youth club leader. Peggy Chen was a middle-class housewife in need of distraction from domestic woes when her friend encouraged her to apply for a position in the Women and Girls section in late 1949. In the same year, Chia Cheong Fook gave up a stenographer position (and higher pay) to become a public assistance investigator. There were also the fresh school and university graduates. After completing her studies at Paya Lebar Methodist Girls' School, Janet Yee joined the Social Welfare Department as an assistant youth officer in 1955 (after her father forbade her to join the police force). The almoner's service started mostly with fresh university graduates, like Daisy Vaithilingam and Cecilia Nayar.[1]

Starting from Scratch

Children's Homes

Tan Beng Neo was one of the few who had substantive experiences in welfare work. She was a trained midwife, and worked for the Salvation Army in various capacities, but primarily managing children and young girls at the Oxley Road home. During the war and occupation, she continued looking after her wards, first at Oxley Road, and then at the former Po Leung Kuk premises in York Hill. Beng Neo remained there until she moved to Malacca, before returning to Singapore to work as a nurse in the Japanese-ran Kandang Kerbau Hospital. Hence, after the war, she was an invaluable resource in building up an official social welfare presence. When the People's Restaurants were opened in June 1946, she assisted in coordinating the operations of restaurants located in Chinatown and the city area. Beng Neo explained:

> So you needed somebody to sort of organize... you know, to get the crowd to queue in an orderly way and that they are being served as quickly as possible. Before 12 o'clock I used to go round on my bicycle and go around and see how the food was.... Occasionally I tasted a bit to see if they're all right.[2]

[1] Information extracted from oral histories and relevant publications.
[2] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 17. See reel 16 for details of her work in the People's Restaurants.

Beng Neo joined the Social Welfare Department officially in September 1947 (at thirty-three years of age). Her first position was assistant matron at the Girls' Homecraft Centre at Queen Street (initially called Nantina Home). She remembered:

> Half the day I was there in the morning. I had the little ones. I had to teach them, looked after them, cleaned them up sometimes. And in the afternoon, 2 o'clock, I had to go to the main office and did investigation work.[3]

As envisioned by the Singapore Executive, the center symbolized a new approach to the rehabilitation of women and young girls at risk (such as orphans, victims of abuse etc.), by separating them from known prostitutes to avoid the perceived bad influence of the former – who were initially accommodated in Pasir Panjang Girls' Home. When asked about the type of girls in Nantina, Beng Neo recalled a particular family with four girls:

> Well, there was a family of four …. Yes, four children, all girls. Mother just went mental, no trace of father or anything whatsoever. One little girl, she was about three at the most. She wet her pants. I had to clean her up, changed her pants, cleaned her up and so on.

She also recalled that the oldest one was about "seven or eight" and she would try to teach them the alphabet and a little music. Beng Neo's recollections outlined in stark terms the very basic, rudimental facilities available at the center during its first year of operation:

> There wasn't even a blackboard or chairs or anything. So they used to sit on the sort of platform. You see, Nantina used to be a sort of Japanese hotel or something. So they had those types of platforms which very useful. They didn't have to sit on the bare floor. So they sat on this platform with me... The little ones would sit on my lap. I used to give them a bit of love and cuddle and things like that. And I just looked after them as if they belonged to me, as if I was their auntie or mother.

In December 1947, Beng Neo was asked to take over the former Overseas Chinese Orphanage at Upper Wilkie Road (off Selegie Road).[4] Renamed Mount Emily Boys' Home, it

[3] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 17.

[4] The orphanage, initially started by Mrs. Lim Boon Keng and financed by Mr. Aw Boon Haw immediately after the Japanese occupation, housed children who lost their fathers during the war and whose mothers were unable to adequately care for them. In 1947, the management of the home requested the Social Welfare Department to take over "control and running of the Home", primary reason being the inability to continue financing the home. (On this matter, see NAS, SCA 5/47 for discussions during Social Welfare Council meetings and CSO 952/49 for a background brief before the government took over). In 1953, the home moved to Pasir Panjang, into what was originally the holiday bungalow of the Sultan of Perak. It was renamed Perak House Home for Boys. Taken from information brochure in NAS, PRO 309/54.

had just over a hundred children between the ages of six and fifteen. When she was interviewed some forty years after, Beng Neo could still vividly recall that the place was:

> [F]ilthy, stinks like a zoo. The children, little boys of six and seven had lice on their heads. The bugs were crawling up the walls. They had scabies, red eyes, and chicken pox all in one go. There was a teacher who had two adopted children. But I don't think they were paid at all. Because she just went out to some other work to earn a bit of money, but lived there.

Beng Neo took over a chaotic situation at Mount Emily Home, a consequence of insufficient donations in the immediate post-war situation. The residential staff [was] looking after their own children and hence the other children were neglected. "And there wasn't any food. Two jars of salt, that's all I found in that Home". The Social Welfare Department supplied extra food rations prepared for the child feeding centers, but those were for children from two to six years old while Beng Neo had "boys of ten, eleven and twelve, they needed a lot of food. So I managed to persuade the parents to bring their rice ration. And every day I cooked a huge pot of rice and I got a lot of dehydrated soup mix and boiled these great, big pots...."[5]

Beng Neo remembered "the first year when I landed there, there was no money. There was no vote [allocated budget] for that Home". Here, her wartime experiences in scrounging and making do with limited resources came in handy. From December 1947 to December 1948, she had to essentially work with what was available. Mount Emily Boys' Home benefited from the communal feeding schemes, receiving food from the central kitchens. Canvas for temporary shelters supplied by the Red Cross was promptly bartered for equipment and other materials more urgently needed by the home, such as sewing machines and unbleached calico for clothing. The physical structure of the building moreover had to be cleaned and refurbished. With some help from the Fire Brigade (fetching water from a nearby hydrant), Beng Neo and the children scrubbed the building clean. There were other issues. There was only one light; the wirings in and around the building were exposed in poor condition, which was a tempting source of adventure for bored children. A particularly mischievous Shanghainese boy found a switch with faulty wiring that gave users a mild electric shock. He incited a six-year old boy to touch it and the latter came away with a shock and a red mark across his chest. Beng Neo punished the older boy with two smacks of a ping-pong bat on his backside.[6]

[5] A child could be defined as an orphan if s/he had lost a parent or was abandoned by both parents.
[6] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 17.

Beng Neo found opportunities in adversity. She organized the children into work parties as part of their in-house education. She taught the older boys to sew and make clothing with the materials and sewing machines obtained through barter. The boys were also sorted into groups for cooking and maintenance around the home. She enlisted help from the general public, such as staff from a nearby swimming pool to teach swimming, and a scout to start up a Scouts Troop. Two girls from the Pasir Panjang Girl's Home were enlisted to come to the Home to cook. She also organized a sale of work during Christmas to raise funds, getting the boys to use the spare Red Cross canvas to make shopping bags and handles. A daily schedule was mapped out, providing some elementary lessons, a duty roster of house chores and sufficient playtime. Older boys were encouraged to find outside employment, and came back to the Home after work for food and sleep. As there were few other full-time departmental staff in the beginning, Beng Neo lived in the Home and became the boys' surrogate mother. She took her position very seriously, once to the point of confronting one of her former charges for cheating on his wife, long after he left the home and was a working adult.

Beng Neo worked in Mount Emily from 1947 to December 1949, before moving on to York Hill Home. Before the war, York Hill housed the Po Leung Kuk, the home for rescued juvenile prostitutes. During the British Military Administration, it was used to house transients and the destitute. In 1948, the Girls' Homecraft Centre at Nantina was relocated to York Hill. Staff shortages meant that she had to act for a time as the matron for both Mount Emily and York Hill Homes until December 1949, when she took sole charge of the latter. The Girls' Homecraft Centre at York Hill went beyond its initial objectives of being a rudimentary trade school for girls at risk of falling into "moral danger". It became a residential home for girls from infancy to school-going age, and was considerably larger than Mount Emily Boys' Home. Beng Neo recalled that while she made do with a couple of assistants at Mount Emily, York Hill had a staff of "about ten, myself, my assistance, one House Mistress, three instructors and four *amahs*".[7] When she took over, York Hill was home for nearly two hundred females, including twenty babies in a nursery, a mix of orphans, abuse victims, petty criminals or those from troubled families.

Beng Neo divided them into two broad groups, one school-going and the other designated as "Home girls". The latter were mostly "overage girls, they were all in all sorts of trouble, sometimes involved with men. Some were even pregnant. I had every type except

[7] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 19.

juvenile prostitutes.... So, sometimes they would run away from home. Sometimes they were ill-treated. You should see some of them with marks all over their body, legs and ... [everywhere]. They had been bashed about. But some had been very naughty, had to run away, involved with men. And a few might even be theft cases". The "Home girls" also followed a time-table, oft-times in the educational format originally envisaged by the Singapore Executive. The girls learned sewing and embroidery work to make clothing "for the younger ones". They were also involved in the preparation of meals "for the rest of the Home and cooking for the nursery children". Essentially, they were learning to take care of infants and younger children residing in York Hill.

Beng Neo had to deal with similar financial restrictions at York Hill as at Mount Emily. To make sure the girls were not cooped up on the Home premises all the time, she organized:

> [A] lot of outings because you can't keep children in all the time without ... seeing the outside world. It's not good for them. So I tried to ... take them out as much as I could or as much as the Department could afford to give me the transport ... because they didn't give you any extra for food or anything when you take them out.... So every now and then, even when I was on leave, I would have a bill when I came back. My staff would say, "We bought so many chickens and so many this and so many that". So I used to pay out of my pocket.[8]

The girls would leave York Hill if they found work upon completion of school or if they married. Beng Neo recalled that sometimes she had to "persuade" the Department to give a "dowry" for the orphaned girls, about "$75", which she would then use to bring the girl shopping:

> A pair of shoes, a pair of slippers, a comb, a hair brush, hair oil, a toothbrush and toothpaste, a pair of scissors, powder, lipstick, Eau de Cologne, talcum powder, a mug, a basin, two pieces of scented soap, two suits of pyjamas, three sets of underclothing, three to six dresses, six handkerchiefs and a little sort of suitcase to put all the things in. So that she goes out, at least she has a certain amount of decent things to start life with.[9]

Beng Neo was describing a situation where an orphaned girl had no one else to turn to except the State, as represented by the Home and the Social Welfare Department. The items described above are just about the bare essentials one reasonably expects a person to possess,

[8] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 19
[9] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 19

or at least the resources to possess them. In retrospect, it is difficult to even conceive of the type of life these desperately destitute and abandoned girls would have faced had it not been for the Home.

The situation was something Peggy Chen soon experienced as an investigator with the Women and Girls Section from 1949 to 1951. The Social Welfare Department was empowered by the Women and Girls Protection Ordinance to detain girls under the age of eighteen years. Department staff would accompany police during anti-vice raids on brothels or other sites suspected of having juvenile prostitutes. Chen remembered that she was initially shocked by the idea of selling one's body or a person to make ends meet. She helped rescue girls and young women – some as young as thirteen – from makeshift cubicle brothels in the depths of Chinatown shop-houses.[10] Like the little girl Ah Meng seen in Chapter 4, they were mostly sold off by impoverished parents, "purchased" and then put to work by pimps who were predominantly old Cantonese women. The old women were not necessarily malicious or evil, but they themselves might have had little to no social support in their old age.[11]

The reach and protection of York Hill Home had its limits. For some girls who left York Hill, their lives did not immediately get better despite Beng Neo's best efforts. She remembered a girl repeatedly abused by her husband despite warning signs before marriage. Another girl was adopted but returned "beaten up and half-starved".[12] At the wedding of one of her girls, Beng Neo recalled "shutting up" several female relatives of the groom after hearing their snide comments – because her natural mother could or did not make the effort to ensure her daughter was presentable on her wedding day. The stigma of an institutional home was omnipresent and left Beng Neo with a feeling of helplessness. She noted that people did not "understand that the Home is for training" and received girls who had an assortment of problems.[13] One particularly poignant story was of a ten or eleven-year old girl who came to York Hill because her father was dead and her mother was hospitalized with tuberculosis.

> And I used to take her to the hospital to see the mother. I even left the address and all that but the hospital never inform us when the mother died. It was, I think, a couple of months or when I took the girl back to the hospital that we found that she was dead and already buried. And I had to console the girl….[14]

[10] NAS OHC, Peggy Chen. Women through the Years: Economic & Family Lives. Accession Number 003052. Interviewed in 2006. Reels 4 and 5 (of 5).
[11] NAS OHC, Peggy Chen, reel 4.
[12] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 20.
[13] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 19.
[14] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 19.

The presence of Beng Neo was a boon to a fledgling social welfare department badly in need of trained staff to execute its designated functions. When she joined in late 1947, she had already close to two decades of experience working for the Salvation Army. She was able to work independently, not needing much hand-holding or guidance, even during a crisis.[15] She was not the only former Salvation Army staff to join the Social Welfare Department. She recalled that a change in the leadership within the Salvation Army, in particular the departure of Herbert Lord, led to a mini walk-out straight into the Social Welfare Department, staffing positions for probation and home administration.[16]

In March 1951, Beng Neo was sent to England on a UNICEF scholarship for further education and training. By then, she had given the Social Welfare Department about four years' worth of much needed knowledge, expertise as well as initiative. Beng Neo thought that she could have left for England much earlier, "but you know there was so much they couldn't get the staff and to run the Home....You see, staff was not easy to get in those days". At one stage, she was even managing two homes simultaneously. She recalled: "Usually, most of the staff that helped the Social Welfare [Department] really came from the Salvation Army. You see there was nothing, nobody was trained. Nobody was able to do the work. And to get somebody to take over my job was quite ... you know, a task". She suggested in her oral interview that

> [T]he jobs that [the Social Welfare Department] started did not seem to progress until the Salvation Army officers joined them. And they were very glad to have us. Because you see, when I got in, they would just leave you and gave you the job and nobody bothered to come and see you. They might come and say, "Hello! How are you getting on?" and that's about all.[17]

Boys' Clubs

Beng Neo was not the only one to experience the hands-off approach. Others, with even less experience, remembered a similar situation when they joined the Social Welfare Department. In 1949, twenty-seven-year-old Toh Mah Keong had just returned from Brunei

[15] One of which was the Maria Hertogh case. Maria Hertogh spent just over three months at York Hill under Tan Beng Neo's supervision, Reels 20 and 21. In his interview (reel 16), McNeice thought the wife of an assistant secretary in the Department had gotten information as to Nadra's whereabouts, resulting in a photo being published of an ostensibly Muslim girl kneeling before a statute of the Virgin Mary. T. Eames Hughes was then the Secretary for Social Welfare and published an account of the incident in *Tangled Worlds: The Story of Maria Hertogh* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1980).
[16] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 21
[17] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 21

after working for Shell. He wanted to remain in Singapore to be close to his family. A friend of a friend was working in the Social Welfare Department, and so happened to be looking for someone to start up a Boys' Club. Mah Keong's job interview was noteworthy for its arbitrariness:

> Mr. MacCormack had a look at me. Then he … went away and came back [with] two medicine balls, a very heavy type of ball.... He threw one of the balls at me and on reflex action, I received the ball and that action sort of proved to him that I think this man can work. I don't know what he meant because as he sat down he says, "Well, you have proved yourself and you can get this job".[18]

Mah Keong was then introduced to Carl de Souza, a local-born Eurasian who had just returned from his studies in London to oversee the youth clubs.[19] Even so, Mah Keong was not aware of what he was supposed to do or the nature of his job, and only had de Souza's vague reassurance that they will work together and "find their way around". De Souza then brought him to an "old dilapidated house or bungalow" along Prince Edward Road (behind Connell House, on the site of the present-day Temasek Tower). Mah Keong recalled that "there were no windows to this house. There was only one tap and doors". De Souza posted Mah Keong there, because it was a "Hokkien area" and the latter could speak Hokkien, with the following instructions, "Now, what we do with you is this. I supplied you with a lot of sporting equipment. The idea is to get hold of children or young boys initially, get the boys first and try and teach them some kind of sports or some kind of games and then keep them busy...." Mah Keong went to a storeroom and collected "a lot of footballs and basketballs and carom boards", brought them back to the club house and wondered how to get boys interested.[20] He likened his approach to the Pied Piper of Hamelin:

> So I went round and saw some boys in that area. They were playing cards in the streets. But I brought a ball with me. That time perhaps as I said, there were very few sporting shops available. When a group of boys sees a ball, that was a rubberized basketball, they said "where you get it?" I said, "If you want

[18] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong. Special Project. Accession Number 000001. Interviewed in 1979, Reel 4 (of 10). Charles MacCormack arrived in Singapore with the British Military Administration, and worked in the Refugees and Displaced Persons Section.

[19] Carl Francis de Souza (b. 1919) was among the first staff members of the Social Welfare Department, and one of the first to be sent overseas for further education. After his studies, de Souza worked in various sections of the Department. See *The Straits Times*, 6 May 1951, "A young man who is going places". He was also in the prewar Straits Settlement Volunteer Corps, and survived incarceration as a prisoner-of-war (including a stint on the Death Railway). He was interviewed by the OHC for his experiences during the Japanese Occupation. NAS OHC, Carl Francis de Souza. Prisoners-of-War (POWs). Accession Number 000290. 7 reels.

[20] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 4.

> to play, you come and play with me", and out of curiosity, they stopped their game and they followed me – these five or six of them followed me and I brought them back to this Prince Edward Road building and we started to play the games. There were a lot of compendium games like ludo and snakes and ladders and all that.... They come around and kick the ball that I offered them. The field just in front of the building. That started the nucleus of the boy members of this club.[21]

The club officially opened in May 1948.[22] There were ambitious plans to open at least fifty clubs in the city area.[23] The boys' club initiative was first mooted by the Singapore Executive during the British Military Administration, in a bid to address the social dislocation in male youths caused by the Japanese Occupation, such as lack of schooling, and general poverty that could lead to delinquency and crime. There was also the "small" matter of a competing force in the Communists, for whom supposedly idle and impressionable youths could form the basis of a mass movement. After much difficulty raising funds, the Singapore Executive managed to start a boys' club at Queen Street in April 1946 (as discussed in Chapter 3). In addition to the boys' club at Queen Street, three other clubs were opened in Katong (along Joo Chiat Road), in Keppel Harbor (within Singapore Harbour Board land), and in the Malay Settlement in Eunos.[24] From June 1946, the Social Welfare Department took over the existing clubs and the task of establishing more boys' clubs. An underlying principle of establishing and developing such clubs was that they were to be run by "volunteers", and not by the Social Welfare Department or government. The other clubs were managed by a committee, formed by members of the community living in the area, the general public, and/or voluntary organizations. The Prince Edward club was the first to be directly managed by an officer from the Social Welfare Department. Though it was felt that such a method to be "inferior", it was "desirable at this stage to have at least one club under the immediate supervision of the Social Welfare Department for use as a training ground for club leaders".[25] The "inferior" method was apparently discontinued in November 1949, as management of the club was transferred to the Singapore Police Force.[26]

Interviewed in 1979, Mah Keong gave a former club leader's perspective into the origins of the clubs. His recollections are presented below almost verbatim to give the reader a sense of the work (as Mah Keong remembered it). They give insights not only into the

[21] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 4.
[22] *The Straits Times*, 26 May 1948, "New Boys' Club for Singapore".
[23] *The Straits Times*, 30 May 1948, "Singapore Aims at 50 Boys Clubs".
[24] *The Second Report*, pp. 17-19.
[25] *The Third Report*, p. 21.
[26] The Straits Times, 15 November 1949, "S'pore Police 'Adopt' 120 Boys". See also SWDAR for 1950, p. 7.

social conditions of postwar Singapore and their effects on youths, they also illustrate to some extent how he acted as a conduit for community building and development among the youths he was responsible for.

> [The boys] were unschooled during the three and a half years or even if they do go to school, they didn't go to English School or a proper Chinese School. So they would become overage for the new schools that's already commenced in 1946 and they have nothing to do and so some of them are idling their way in five-foot ways or running helter-skelter about in the part of the city where they stayed and they are becoming... not delinquents but they can become unruly sometimes. One of my principal aims was to be able to take them away from the streets...and also to perhaps inculcate in them a sense of responsibility of having to do the right thing by themselves by...being at home when you are required and play when you are allowed to play. And also, don't spend and idle your way in five-foot ways gambling...and hope for some other boys to come and be swindled by you playing cards.[27]

Prince Edward Boys' Club catered to male youths staying nearby, such as "Choon Guan Street, Stanley Street and Tanjong Pagar area". Mah Keong also gave some insight into housing conditions then:

> Because at that stage there were no proper housing provided by the government. So you'll find that those were all rented houses and the people... some of them do rent only a front room or another family rents the back room, and some of the families – about say eighteen to twenty families stay in one three-storied building and all the children did not play in those areas. So they get around to play in the streets and from this group, I brought them into the club and I think it was my looking into the problem of these boys having practically nothing to do in the afternoon or in the early morning, that I made it a point to get only those children of lower income group.[28]

The club leader however did not allow segregation by economic status:

> There were a good many who are better-dressed boys. But they do come and I do not prevent them from joining these other boys, nor did these boys who are from lower income group shun from the type of boys who come from better income family, and I have seen that in the sense that some of the boys who come from better family sometimes ride beautiful or very nice bicycles to the club, parked at the club. They don't lock it. Then the poorer boys will come and say, "Can I borrow?" And they say, "OK, OK" because they have new-found friends. The boys who are from a better income group perhaps have not

[27] "They do all sorts of funny things. Two or three of them would bully the younger ones and say, 'Ok, let's play these cards'. But then two or three boys will make signs where they can win off this fellows' fifty cents or twenty cents from them". NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 4.
[28] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 5.

> had occasion to mix around with these others and out of curiosity to make new friends, they allow them and then there is very good rapport between the groups.[29]

In the end, the club "had a very mixed group of boys":

> There were some boys, as [the] premises is near Tanjong Pagar, there were some Malay boys or Chinese boys and these Chinese boys speak Malay. So they are Peranakans and they come in and there were also Indian boys who come from this Tanjong Pagar area.... Then there were the Hokkien-speaking group from Stanley Street, Choon Guan Street. They come and mix. Hitherto they were never mixing together. All these Hokkien-speaking were not mixed with the Tanjong Pagar boys who are Malay-speaking. But when I established this club, they come together and eventually know each other. I think that helps.... [The] majority of them are from Chinese schools. Some of them even come from Chinese Middle Schools. They do come to my club. In spite of their not being able to converse – you know, English-speaking boys and Mandarin-speaking boys from different schools – they do get along and if there are any difficulty they speak in dialect.[30]

There were initial teething problems, but somehow the boys managed to resolve them with minimum fuss:

> We had some difficulty in the sense that some boys who are from English schools, Chinese boys from English schools..., they speak Malay among themselves. When they mixed with these Chinese, they learned this Hokkien dialect a little. They could speak if they want to but they could not express themselves. So, the Chinese-speaking boys, either Hokkien or Teochew, sort of managed to express themselves with them and eventually these Peranakans – the boys from Malay-speaking family – they learned some Hokkien words and Teochew words. Surprising, but there you are, they get along.[31]

Mah Keong recalled that by the time he was forced to step down for medical reasons (sometime in late 1948), the club had no less than eighty to ninety boys participating in club activities.[32] In the context of staff shortages as well as the work he had accomplished in getting the club up and running within a short period of time, Mah Keong's departure was seen as a "serious blow" that "set the club back a great deal".[33] His "one-man show" was difficult to replicate as the Department encountered problems finding a suitable replacement.

[29] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 5.
[30] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 5.
[31] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 5.
[32] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 6. The SWDAR for 1948 (*The Third Report*, p. 21) recorded a higher number of 160 members.
[33] *The Third Report*, p. 21.

His experiences establishing Prince Edward Boys' Club made him a prized asset. In 1951, Mah Keong was employed by the Social Welfare Department on a permanent basis and was involved in establishing and developing new and existing boys' clubs, including one on Pulau Tekong (at the request of the Singapore Police Force).[34]

Forging Social Bonds

When asked to reflect on his role as a youth club leader and on social work in general, Mah Keong used his experience running the Pulau Tekong Boys' Club to frame his response. He noted that because he chose to reside full-time on the small island in the club's first year, he came to be seen by the 5,000-odd residents on the island as the government's representative. And not just for club matters:

> So sometimes they do have problems they come and ask me and whatever I know, I tell them. Even sometimes you'll have people wanting to get certain kind of admission into the maternity hospital. They said don't know [how to go about it]. I said, "You look [for] the nurse, but if you want arrangements for certain kind of transport in the night, if there is any complication, I make arrangements with the Marine Police Department to help out.[35]

The above demonstrates the extent an officer of the Social Welfare Department could have played in forging social bonds. What Mah Keong did in rendering assistance and providing information, was no different to the duties performed by former Protectors of Chinese, colonial District Officers, or local heads of villages and communities. But his actions were perhaps noteworthy in the context of a new social welfare department and a new approach to colonial society. They were significant in the broader context of inculcating an

[34] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 7. Interestingly, the Pulau Tekong Boy's Club was set up at the request of the Singapore Police Force (Marine Division). The police had a keen interest in the development of the boys' clubs, and had a representative on each club's management committee. See NUSCL, CO 1030/268. Progress summary for April/May 1954 Progress Summary.

[35] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 7. Mah Keong described in vivid detail (from memory) the club house: "It was an old barrack-like building of the British encampment there. The British at that time made the place as one of those strategic points where they built gun emplacements and tower. This barrack-like thing is again – is not dilapidated – it's got hard concrete building but without window, without doors". He also described the community: "There is a Malay school and a Chinese school, and there is an English school there which was recently instituted…. So I got hold of these boys… of course their parents were also curious. They also came. The first day I got boys to come and register, thinking that easiest thing to get them interested is to keep their curiosity at bay…. They came, some of them with their parents. Some of them with their toddlers even thinking that even the toddlers can be registered. Anyway I told them this is a club and explained to them in Malay…. Why? Because the Chinese schoolboys also speak good Malay. Surprisingly. The Malays of course are in a bigger majority there. They are a bigger group and then the Chinese are shopkeepers, some smallholders. They had to work well with the Malays who are a good number of fishermen".

idea that a government, the colonial version moreover, should be responsible for the general well-being of society. This is not to say that such social bonds eventually went on to buttress the late colonial state, the process taking place as it did during the period of decolonization. That next level of state formation requires the consideration of others factors, such as harnessing and managing those bonds for a broader (communitarian, national or even imperial) purpose. But at a basic individual and departmental level, the functions and services provided by the Social Welfare Department were at the forefront of establishing such social connections, laying the foundations for the social welfare state and potential nation-building.

Mah Keong played this role – of forging social bonds – in other capacities during an extended career in the Social Welfare Department. Before he took up the permanent position in 1951, he had been the warden for the Prince Edward Boy's Hostel, also building it up from scratch. The hostel was located on the second floor above the boys' club and designed to have twenty-two beds. According to the Five-Year Plan, hostels were an "indispensable corollary of a probation system", to provide accommodation and supervision for working boys and girls who were released from or at risk of statutory detention.[36] In 1948, the Social Welfare Department started a hostel for forty boys alongside the Queen Street Boys' Club, catering for boys who were "homeless and destitute", working boys with low wages, and reserved a number of "vacancies for boys placed on probation by the Juvenile Court with a condition of residence in the hostel".[37] The duration of residence in the hostel ranged between three to nine months and generally did not exceed a year. Mah Keong recalled:

> This [Prince Edward] Boys' Hostel was started in the sense that there are quite a number of potential delinquents – boys who play truant, boys who are in their early teens, mix around with bad companies. They were misfits in their family, particularly of course [when] their parents themselves [had] no time to look after them. So they get around with other boys and learned some of the misdeeds, like pick-pocketing. Some even…pilfer shops and then these parents find it hard to look after them…. A good number of them were sent by the Juvenile Court and to be put in residence for between three to six months.[38]

In the interview, Mah Keong's earnestness in ensuring the interviewer did not go away with a certain impression of the hostel residents was clear. He mentioned several times, at times unprompted, that "we don't treat them as criminals or even delinquents. They may be

[36] *Five Year Plan*, p. 6. The section on Youth Welfare had called for a total of eleven hostels by 1953.
[37] *The Third Report*, p. 22.
[38] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 5.

potential delinquents but we find that they are just wayward – a bit off the track and we sort of put him back properly again".[39] In doing so, Mah Keong painted several profiles of the boys he supervised:

> They have not committed any crime. They were just sent there to see [if] they could rehabilitate themselves…. You'll be surprised some of them have gone into police work, some have…become managers of theatres, some have started their own business. They were not naughty boys in that sense. In fact some of them come from a home where the father drinks, the mother gambles and then there is quarreling in the house; and some were orphans, part orphans actually.[40]

To reemphasize the point that the hostel residents were not criminals or out-and-out delinquents, Mah Keong cited a case where a "very well-to-do" father actually paid for his son's stay in the hostel. The boy had been spending more money than he had or should have.

> [K]nowing that he comes from quite a well-to-do family spends a lot of his money – whatever allowance he can get from the parents as well as from the grandfather or grandma; so he spends unnecessarily, sometimes to a stage of owing some shops in the name of the father to buy twenty ties and five pairs of shoes for friends. He was brought in to see me and eventually I sort of managed to tame him down on this aspect of his life.[41]

Such a level of supervision describes a more structured and intrusive approach, going beyond his earlier duties as a club leader.

> As a warden, we'll have to see to [the boys'] daily routine, which means must keep themselves clean, and if they have to go to work, they get to go to work, come back at a time when they finished off work…. Say the boy finishes off at 4 o'clock, we should expect him not later than 4.30 or at the latest 5 o'clock. There are boys who worked very early in the morning. Some of them go to work in say Tanjong Pagar or Harbour Board, they do leave the hostel say perhaps by 6 o'clock or 5.30 to get their transport and then they come back between 3 and 4. After that they are left alone, we see to their meals…. Then we see to their recreation.[42]

For working boys, they registered their earnings with Mah Keong, who would then return a portion for their meals outside and place the remainder in a savings account.[43]

[39] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 6.
[40] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 6.
[41] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 6.
[42] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 5.
[43] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 6. Most of the boys worked in daily-rated jobs.

It was a similar routine for boys attending schools. Mah Keong actually acted as the in-house alarm clock during the early stages. "I'll see to the boys who are going to school getting up as early as quarter to six and then get himself bathed…", even to the extent of ensuring the boy understands what time he should be at the bus-stop so as not to miss the bus. "And then after two or three times he finds that he knows the timing, he gets up very early and gets himself dressed and go to school…." As all schools finish at about 1 o'clock, the boys were expected to be back at the hostel around 1.30 pm. If not, then Mah Keong "would either…phone up the school principal or teacher…", or if the boy was on probation, he would check with the boy's probation officer or with the parents the next day. For those on probation, they were usually not allowed to go back home (or more accurately, their friends in nearby haunts), so as to prevent them from slipping back into the misdemeanors that landed them on probation in the first place. Mah Keong did not resort to this too often as "most of the boys would want to come back because they have not much money in their pocket".[44] Some boys also went home first because they were near their schools.

Mah Keong was new to this "institution type of work", and stayed in Queen Street Boys' Hostel for two months to experience firsthand operating a hostel. He learned that segregation of a "very good set of children" from the "rough and tough boys" may prevent the former group from being influenced by the latter. He came to an agreement with the Queen Street hostel warden, taking in fifteen "good set" boys from Queen Street hostel and using them as a nucleus to start Prince Edward hostel. The latter was structured for boys who required minimal supervision; indeed, getting transferred from Queen Street to Prince Edward was seen as a "promotion".[45] As it was not a place of detention, as the Gimson School was, there were no gates keeping the boys in the hostel or club; they were free to leave the grounds as long as Mah Keong was informed of their whereabouts.

Discipline was more important than security. This was mostly in the form of establishing routines. The boys had to maintain personal hygiene, honor their work and schooling commitments, eat during stipulated hours, and must be in bed ("lights out") by ten in the evening. Parents were allowed to visit on Saturdays, and on rare occasions depending on circumstances, some boys were allowed to go home on Saturdays and return to the hostel the following morning. Supervision or surveillance was limited to keeping the warden apprised of their work and school schedule and progress, as well as any other after-work or

[44] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 6.
[45] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 5.

after-school activities, particularly for schoolboys who did work after their classes. Mah Keong did not recall any instances where he had to penalize boys who returned to the hostel late after their daily schedules; at most, they received a telling-off or a reminder to inform the warden of their whereabouts. The boys also participated in the upkeep of the hostel, grouped into duty rosters to assist with cooking and daily maintenance of the hostel.[46]

Mah Keong's interview was not as expressive as Beng Neo's. But he gave a similar account of the bonds he shared with the boys. When asked if the hostel could have taken in more than its capacity of twenty-two beds, he thought that while it may be ideal, it would not have been easy for "one man to tackle more than ... thirty". This was because, from his experience, Mah Keong was like a "mother, father, brother, sister" to the boys. Apart from supervising daily routines and maintaining progress reports on individual boys, he maintained other information to help with his work:

> I do have a format of the boys' names, the time he comes and his parent's telephone number and the work and the money brought in…. And it was almost a 24-hour job for people like us in the sense that even in my sleep sometimes I find somebody knocked on my door and said, "Mr. Toh, such and such a person has been going to the lavatory for some time. I think he's sick". So I got up and see how bad he is. And he says, "It's okay now, much better…." I sat up waiting for anymore emergency and I don't sleep….[47]

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The bonds Toh Mah Keong and Tan Beng Neo forged with their charges took on different forms and had varying implications. It can take the shape of a deep feeling of gratitude or bond to a former guardian, such as Beng Neo's former charges going out of their way to acknowledge her in public or attempting to buy her meals, or former hostel residents visiting Mah Keong to seek advice about finding work or to pass on news about doing well in school. The not insignificant act of providing financial assistance, or even the mere promise of it, can bring about expressions of gratitude. After completing his investigations, Chia Cheong Fook, who joined the Department's Public Assistance Section in 1950, would sometimes return to his motorbike to see a couple of chickens or several bunches of rambutans hanging by the handlebars – ostensibly tokens of appreciation from grateful applicants for assistance.[48]

[46] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 6.
[47] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 6. His wife was a nurse, and also provided medical assistance when needed.
[48] NAS OHC, Chia Cheong Fook, reel 1. Chia made it clear in the interview that he'd always return the "gifts".

Social bonds could also manifest themselves as feelings of belonging. This Janet Yee discovered when she was posted to a youth club located in a "gangster area" part of Chinatown ("People's Park"). At first wary of the gangsters who loitered nearby, Janet realized that after establishing a bit of rapport with them, they were more than willing to assist her, even providing protective escort to the bus-stop whenever she worked late.[49] She found that despite outwardly tough appearances, the "boys" just wanted to be accepted, "wanted to be identified with me".[50] Working as a probation and aftercare officer during the 1960s, Krishnasamy Vethiveloo (aka K. V. Veloo) saw something similar in the gangsters he came into contact with:

> I was frightened because I was so young and I was dealing with all these gangsters. But I learnt later they were bound by a good code. If they knew you were helping them, they would respect you. But you had to be able to cultivate a bond of confidence and trust with them.[51]

Sometimes, bonds were formed not so much with the people they assisted, but more to certain aspects of the tasks some staff did and found personal meaning and satisfaction in. As an investigator with the Women and Girls Section, Peggy Chen's firsthand experiences rescuing young girls from prostitution played no small part in her maintaining a sense of perspective vis-a-vis her own domestic woes.[52] In encountering a side of life she never imagined before working in the Social Welfare Department, specifically the idea of selling one's body to make ends meet or forcing very young girls into prostitution, Peggy felt "very blessed" and resolved to "learn to live again", mainly through her keenness to do a good job.[53] When asked about his "philosophy to social work", Mah Keong responded:

> When I was doing all these I wasn't thinking so much of whether I was doing social work or anything. But in the throes of it I feel that there is satisfaction that you're dealing with human beings. You'll find that there are so many different ways of looking at life, as I said, low-income group. Even in Tekong,

[49] NAS OHC, Janet Yee, reel 2.
[50] NAS OHC, Janet Yee, reel 2. They would tell her: "Don't worry missy, we don't disturb our own people". (Originally rendered in Teochew in oral interview).
[51] *The Sunday Times*, 11 May 2014, "K.V. Veloo: Helping people from womb to tomb: Ex-Cleansing Inspector made social work his career, despite lucrative bank offers".
. See also his autobiography, K. V. Veloo, *Life and Times of a Social Worker: A Personal Memoir* (Singapore: Wee Kim Wee Centre, Singapore Management University; Singapore Indian Association, 2014). Memoir is "loosely based" on OHC's oral history interviews conducted between November 2007 and January 2008. See NAS OHC, Vethiveloo Krishnasamy @ K V Veloo. The Civil Service - A Retrospection. Accession Number: 003238. Interviewed in 2007. 8 Reels.
[52] NAS OHC, Peggy Chen, reels 4 and 5. Her husband was apparently a serial womanizer.
[53] NAS OHC, Peggy Chen, reel 4. Chen mentioned she would be acknowledged on the streets if recognized by some of the rescued juveniles.

> boys come from parents who are not earning very well. The joy of having to work with such people gives me another different facet of life altogether. I feel that there's some satisfaction and happiness to do things for people. If the result is good I'm happy about what I am doing and because I was also much younger and I wasn't too very worried about whether the job pays me very well or not.[54]

Cheong Fook had a more varied experience, moving from Public Assistance to other sections such as Children and Young Persons, Counselling and Advice, and Women and Girls. But he shared with Peggy similar sentiments when encountering the hardship cases. When queried about how he avoided being emotionally "hardened" or "burned out", Cheong Fook thought it was because he could empathize with some of his cases, having known hardship during his childhood. He said: "I knew how it was to be humiliated, to feel a sense of humiliation. And so, if you were made of some feelings, I suppose your attitude to these things [the people and situations he encountered during the course of his work] is you won't be so harsh".[55] Ideally, positive social bonds, whether between staff and client or between staff and their work, form a kind of tangibility that could become the basis of a community or an institution, or more broadly, a state. This could happen simply by executing his or her duties well, helping to establish a new government department, and developing and maintaining its connections to society. In getting the fledgling Social Welfare Department up and running, pioneering officers like Beng Neo, Peggy, Mah Keong, and Cheong Fook, moreover laid the foundations for their successors to build on.

Joining in March 1955, Janet Yee started as an assistant youth service officer, and remained with the Social Welfare Department (and its successors) till 1989. Ann Elizabeth Wee joined the Social Welfare Department also in 1955 as a training officer, contributing knowledge and expertise from her time as a student at the London School of Economics and Political Science. K. V. Veloo joined the Social Welfare Department in 1964. But he traces the impetus for a distinguished career in social work to the time spent in the Katong Boys' Club, from the other side of the fence so to speak. He joined the club in 1951 while still in school and was elected to the club committee as assistant club leader when he was seventeen years

[54] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 7.
[55] NAS OHC, Chia Cheong Fook, reel 3. Chia recalled students who were unable to pay school fees on time were singled out by making them stand outside the classroom or on a chair in the classroom. "Some teachers ... treated that as a form of punishment; we were humiliated. I used to dread going to school without school fees". Chia himself experienced impoverished conditions: "Sometimes you had no [electricity]. Couldn't pay, they cut off. And you didn't want the neighbors to know you had your electricity cut off, so six o'clock, you go out to a friend's place. [I] happened to have a friend [living] on the main road, so you spent your time until seven, eight o'clock, then you come back. Your neighbors hopefully will be asleep so they don't know that you don't have the lights on you see".

old.[56] All three individuals went on to assume positions of substantive responsibility and influence in the government, and each played influential and pioneering roles in shaping the direction of social work and social policy in Singapore.[57] From their oral interviews, all three shared and expressed similar sentiments in relation to the work they did. These included a general preference to work with people, their ability to mix with groups from various socio-economic (as well as ethnic and linguistic) backgrounds, and the personal satisfaction those interactions gave them. For instance, when touching briefly on the political turmoil in the early 1960s, Janet Yee replied:

> Basically I think I've … got no appetite for all these politicking matters. Actually, at that point, I was still very idealistic. I want to help people and I am not interested in politics or who say what…. I am more interested in social justice, welfare and people. Basically I am a people's person. I like people.[58]

Similarly, Ann Wee on social work and teaching:

> Well, I think for anybody in social work or in teaching, the feeling that somebody's life is a little bit different because you were there. I don't think there's any satisfaction quite so heart-warming as that … feeling that somebody has acquired something or avoided some problem or being equipped in some way, in a way that it wouldn't have been so if you haven't been there. That I think, is the greatest reward of all. I think this is what keeps people going in social work.[59]

Social bonds could also take the form of connections with other organizations and associations, indirectly extending the reach of the late colonial state. Taking the youth clubs

[56] NAS OHC, K. V. Veloo, reel 2 (of 8). He mentioned he was encouraged to do so by Tan Thoop Lip, the brother of Dr. Maggie Lim (nee Tan).

[57] Ann Wee became head of the Department of Social Studies in 1967, maintaining over the years an intimate relationship with the social service sector (both government and voluntary organizations). Janet Yee held various senior positions in the Social Welfare Department (including Deputy Director of Social Welfare), and was influential in policy and programs concerning family services, children, and the elderly. K. V. Veloo was the first Chief Probation and Aftercare Officer in 1971 and later became Director of Social Welfare. He also launched Prison Welfare Service and Community Probation program in 1973 to aid the families of prisoners, and was the first President of the Singapore Association of Social Workers. Information taken from the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame (initiated and maintained by the Singapore Council of Women's Organization), online articles and Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, *Helping Hands, Touching Lives: 60 Years Making a Difference*.

[58] NAS OHC, Janet Yee, reel 3. Yee was asked why she did not return to the People's Association in 1961 as part of a team from the Social Welfare Department to help with the fallout of the strike by more than a hundred PA employees. The strike was organized in support of seventeen former colleagues who had been dismissed earlier, and was connected to the split of the Barisan Sosialis from the People's Action Party in July 1961. For contemporary reports, see *The Straits Times*, 26 September 1961, "Strike by half the People's Assn. staff", *The Straits Times*, 18 November 1961, "Inquiry Commission for the People's Assn. row", and *The Straits Times*, 13 December 1961, "Govt., Barisan clash over People's Assn. strike".

[59] NAS OHC, Ann Wee, reel 4 (of 4).

for example, it was never the Social Welfare Department's intention to be fully responsible for their establishment and management. From the start, the development of youth clubs was to be a collaborative effort, between government and voluntary organizations. The government's role was, as far as possible, limited to a supervisory position and/or the provision of grants to help with the running of the clubs. In August 1952, the then Acting Secretary for Social Welfare (T. E. Smith) contacted various associations requesting their aid in "sponsoring and running new Boys' and Girls' Clubs in Singapore".[60] He noted that at that time, there were only eight boys' clubs and no club for girls. Smith's letter gave some idea of the resources needs, such as a building or part of it, equipment for sports and other activities, and trained club leaders. While the Social Welfare Department was in a position to help (to a limited extent) with the latter two, physical buildings were more difficult to come by. Even though the Department was willing to consider allowing an extension to the Children's Social Centres (which were themselves mostly in poor condition, a couple operating out of nothing more than a shed), it was realized that "some of the associations to whom this letter is addressed to might be in a position to provide a building for part or whole time use as a Boys' or Girls' Club".[61]

One who answered the call was Shirin Fozdar, a founding member of the Singapore Council of Women. On February 1953, the first girls' club in Singapore was officially opened, operating out of a Children's Social Centre located in Joo Chiat (in the eastern part of Singapore).[62] The following week, Fozdar made a public appeal to the "Privileged Women of Singapore", requesting volunteers to help teach "English, Chinese, Malay, sewing, dress-making etc". to about two hundred girls who had expressed interest in joining the club.[63] The following year, in March 1954, a second girls' club opened in Siglap, a predominantly Malay area (along present-day East Coast Road). Land for the club had been donated by a member of the public and the club was managed by Seow Peck Leng, then a teacher and school principal, as well as a member of the Singapore Council of Women.[64] Janet Yee's first job

[60] NAS, Singapore Council of Women (SCW). T. E. Smith to Shirin Fozdar, 12 August 1952. (Private Records, microfilm number: NA 2044). Reported in the *The Straits Times*, 26 October 1952, "The Girls with Nowhere to Go"; and *The Singapore Free Press*, 6 September 1952, "Govt. Plea for More Clubs for Youth".
[61] NAS, SCW. T. E. Smith to Shirin Fozdar, 12 August 1952.
[62] *The Straits Times*, 20 February 1953, "Dignity is Best Defence". See also SWDAR for 1953, p. 12.
[63] NAS, SCW, Shirin Fodzar, 26 February 1953. The files include brief information on setting up the club.
[64] Later stood for elections in Mountbatten constituency in 1959 General Elections for the Singapore People's Alliance (SPA) and became the one of the few elected female Legislative Assemblywoman. Siglap Girls Club was renamed the Singapore Women's Association in 1960. See Singapore Women's Association: Our Milestones. http://singaporewomenassociation.org/en/who. Accessed 21 July 2015. See NAS OHC interviews of Seow Peck Leng (Political History in Singapore 1945-1965. Accession Number: 000721. Interviewed in 1987).

with the Department was to assist Seow in organizing club activities for girls.[65] Hence, in some ways, the Social Welfare Department's efforts to involve the general public in its work, as included in the original social welfare policy directive drafted during the war, could be seen as an extension of the personal bonds discussed earlier. In the case of the youth clubs, the Department forged connections with other government agencies, local communities, voluntary organizations and advocacy groups, such as the Singapore Police Force, the Singapore Harbour Board, the Y's Men of Singapore (a splinter group from the Young Men's Christian Association), the Singapore Council of Women, and even the youths themselves, who formed committees to help manage the clubs.

Forging personal bonds and building community connections were not all smooth-sailing. Except for the clubs established in Siglap and Joo Chiat, the Social Welfare Department's appeal for more youth clubs was met with a deafening silence.[66] It was a major disappointment as the Social Welfare Department's Five-Year Plan had projected twenty-six youth clubs to be built and readied by 1953, including seven girls' clubs. When the appeal was made in late 1952, there were eight clubs in existence and all for boys, far short of the ambitious objective of fifty clubs planned for back in 1948. The situation improved only slightly in the following year, with a total of twelve youth clubs built. But as it was still less than half of the projected number, the Social Welfare Department was forced to reconsider its approach of soliciting partnerships to develop youth clubs and services.[67] From available evidence, it was not so much a lack of money or even trained staff that impeded progress, but rather the lack of buildings and structures to house the clubs. There was also the not insignificant matter of the absence of stability at the top, as the colonial officials were posted out and others dropped in, and sometimes only for short duration. At the individual level, there were also moments when staff in various positions had to confront situations no amount of training could prepare them, resulting in a range of situations, some humorous, others tragic and poignant – all of which offer some insight into the other side of social bonds, which were those on the receiving end of social welfare and their needs.

[65] NAS OHC, Janet Yee, reel 2.
[66] *The Straits Times*, 25 February 1953, "Poor response to Singapore call for youth clubs".
[67] SWDAR for 1954, pp. 15-16.

Vulnerable Individuals

As Lady Superintendent, Tan Beng Neo had to deal with her fair share of unruly children and youths. After foiling a plan to escape (which involved inmates forcibly restraining Home staff), Beng Neo rolled out her intimidation skills, questioning and threatening the "timid" ones until the two ringleaders (at the ripe old ages of fourteen and fifteen years) voluntarily confessed. Beng Neo recalled that:

> I'm not supposed to cane them. But I don't let them know. I don't cane them but I banged on the table.... I usually looked so fierce that they frightened. I had a good laugh when they're out of my sight. You're not really angry with them. You're only trying to teach them, because sometimes they can be very naughty.[68]

The ringleaders in that particular case came from Mount Emily, which from March 1952 became the home for rescued juvenile prostitutes. From the beginning, the Social Welfare Department adopted a strategy of segregating known prostitutes from other girls under its care, to avoid the perceived bad influence of the former on the latter.[69] Up till that point in the interview, Beng Neo had not mentioned any acts of outright disobedience and deliberate attempts to escape from the Home.

The Social Welfare Department's monthly progress summaries and annual reports also included brief case histories of girls sent to Mount Emily and York Hill.[70] One case involved three Hokkien girls who were found in a brothel in 1953. The elder two girls (both fifteen) were "found in locked rooms with their clients at the time of the raid", while the third younger girl (eleven) was alone in another room. One of the elder girls "stated that her husband died six months after their marriage. She had come down to Singapore a week before her arrest, with a view to take up dancing and becoming a dance hostess". The second fifteen-year old "stated that she was sold by her parents when she was twelve years old. She started as a singer and later joined the New World cabaret as a dance hostess. The man found with her had been going out with her for some time and had promised to take her as a secondary wife". The eleven-year old was "claimed by the Principal tenant of the premises raided as her adoptive daughter. The girl is alleged to be the daughter of her husband's

[68] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, Reel 24.
[69] See *The Second Report* and *The Third Report* for a behavioral profile of juvenile prostitutes. In reel 3 of her oral history, Janet Yee also gives a more personal and candid take on juvenile prostitution over time.
[70] Except for 1946, the unpublished monthly, and later quarterly, summaries (from 1947 to 1958) can be found in SCA files collecting the minutes of the Social Welfare Council.

cousin". The principal tenant was convicted and "bound over for a year for $1,000". The eleven-year old was sent to York Hill, while one of the older girls was sent to Mount Emily. The remaining girl was returned to the care of her mother.[71]

Anti-vice raids led to contrasting experiences for accompanying staff. While Peggy Chen laughed at her recollection of being so shocked at catching a couple in the act that she immediately dashed out of the room not knowing how to react,[72] Chia Cheong Fook's disgust was apparent in his interview when he recalled a particular raid in Desker Road where a soldier refused "to stop the act until it's completed".[73] Their sordid but humorous recollections interestingly contrast with the living conditions they found the girls working in. Peggy's slightly embarrassed mirth was tempered by her descriptions of the claustrophobic and squalid working conditions of a cubicle brothel, flanked by small opium dens, in the heart of Chinatown. In contrast, Cheong Fook's disdain of brothels – "hovels" as he called them – was punctuated by slight awe at a more luxurious "massage establishment" along River Valley Road.[74]

The social welfare officers experienced varying responses to their presence. Cheong Fook recalled the "madam" at the "massage establishment" extended an offer to him and his colleague to return. Peggy made passing mention of expressions of gratitude by some of the girls she helped rescue. Janet Yee remembered her supervisor and colleagues from the Women and Girls Section getting urine thrown at them during anti-vice raids. From their interviews, there was no sense that prostitution rackets, at least the ones they witnessed firsthand, were part of a larger system. Their focus was more on the individual. Indeed, Peggy Chen's recollections focused more on the elderly "amahs" who acted as pimps, inadvertently highlighting the plight of the elderly who were unable to work and support themselves (via legal means) as they grew older. In ensuring the care and protection of women and children, the Social Welfare Department also maintained a presence at immigration check points to prevent trafficking and kept a register of "transferred children" – a legacy of the Chinese Protectorate's functions in keeping tabs on vulnerable girls and managing the registration of *mui tsais*.[75] Social welfare officers also conducted regular visits to homes of adopted

[71] SWDAR for 1953, p. 17
[72] NAS OHC, Peggy Chen, reels 4 and 5.
[73] NAS OHC, Chia Cheong Fook, reel 3.
[74] NAS OHC, Chia Cheong Fook, reel 3.
[75] "Transferred children" originally referred to females under the age of 14 years not living with their natural parents (excluding seven categories as proscribed in the Children and Young Persons Ordinance 1949). In 1954, males were included in an amended ordinance. See SWDAR for 1950, pp. 28-29, and SWDAR for 1954, pp 30-31.

children; and responded to calls about children being mistreated. For the latter two especially, staff depended on information provided by the public. In August 1954, a twelve-year old girl was "found with very extensive burn marks on her body", allegedly caused by her foster mother with boiling water. Receiving an anonymous tip-off, social welfare officers visited the home but apparently the foster mother had "successfully concealed" her. After a second (and again unsuccessful) visit, the foster mother voluntarily turned up at the Department with the child, explaining that the latter had been away with relatives. The burn marks were moreover accidental, which the child corroborated. But the girl appeared "scared to speak out". The Assistant Secretary of the Children and Young Persons Section, designated a Protector under the Children and Young Persons Ordinance, intervened and placed the girl in the Girls' Homecraft Centre at York Hill for her safety.[76]

Family Needs

Sometimes, tragically, children were hurt by their biological parents. A case drawn from the records of the Social Welfare Department, quoted in full below, illustrates the multifaceted problems a family in postwar Singapore might have had to deal with:

> There was a case of H, a boy aged four years who was persistently ill-treated by his natural mother. The Protector found after an enquiry that the boy is one of six children who ages ranged from one to nine years. The mother has had little to no rest from child birth and was in fact shortly expecting another baby. The father was recently involved in an accident which has immobilised him from his waist upwards. The family became destitute and was dependent on a Public Assistance allowance. The mother found it very difficult to cope with her family, and in frustration vented her anger on H. The other children appeared well cared for and it was discovered upon investigation that H had been fostered out soon after birth and had only returned about a year or so previously. He was kept in a place of safety for a few months and was then returned to the family. Periodic visits are made to the home to advise the mother on the proper understanding and upbringing of her children and to ensure against further ill-treatment.[77]

[76] SWDAR for 1954, p. 30/ See also NUSCL, CO 1030/268. The SWDAR paints a slightly but fundamentally different picture of what was presumably the same case. It suggested that there was a case, but it was dismissed due to lack of evidence despite "neighbours [witnessing] the offence". The public report made the point that "It has been found difficult to get persons to come forward to give evidence against offenders. Good neighbourly relations appear to be more important…."

[77] SWDAR for 1954, p. 30. The Monthly Progress Summary for April indicated that the boy's injuries were serious enough to warrant prosecution but was decided against. The boy was discharged to his grandmother. NUSCL, CO 1030/268.

Poverty was one of several factors affecting this particular family. The injury suffered by the father did not only lead to a loss of income, it also added unquantifiable stress on his spouse and children. The relative lack of familiarity between H and his natural mother possibly exacerbated the situation that then led to physical abuse. As seen in earlier examples, poverty, in the crude sense of insufficient income, had led to the sale of children, the resorting to prostitution to make ends meet, and/or physical violence out of frustration. The Social Welfare Department also encountered "a few desperate cases" where the men deliberately planned to take his children, but not his wife, and return home to India or China.[78] Desertion was not exclusive to a particular gender either. There were instances where the wife was the "leading and aggressive party".[79] One report sounded almost exasperated when describing a case whereby a wife walked out on a marriage and several kids "for reason[s] known only to herself".[80] Families also hit rocky ground due to problems of gambling, drink, and other vices such as opium smoking.

H's brief case summary is quoted in full partly to demonstrate how the family in question came into contact with the various sections within the Social Welfare Department. H, the four-year old, was assisted by staff from the Children and Young Persons Section and then temporarily placed in one of the Department's homes. The injured father was given financial aid through Public Assistance. The amount given was admittedly below subsistence levels, as financial aid was meant to be temporary and was reviewed periodically by public assistance investigators.[81] Between its original introduction in late 1945 up till to August 1951, the amount given was still based on the initial rationale of spreading Malayan dollars (irrelevant by the 1950s) and for immediate and expedient relief.

In 1951, the scheme was reviewed and rationalized. The rates were increased, and the scope of assistance was considerably expanded. Whereas before public assistance was left almost entirely up to the investigator's assessment (and then approved by the Social Welfare Department), now they were guided by criteria of age and residency. Public Assistance from 1951 targeted the aged (those who had at least twenty years' residency in Singapore), the permanently disabled and widows with children (at least ten years' residency), and all other cases, such as the temporarily disabled or unemployed (at least three years' residency).[82]

[78] NUSCL, CO 1030/248. Progress Summary for April 1954.
[79] NUSCL, CO 1030/248. Progress Summary for April 1954.
[80] NUSCL, CO 1030/248. Progress Summary for April 1954. Apparently, the wife had also commented that she was "giving up everything in the old world" to start life afresh.
[81] *The Third Report*, p. 36.
[82] SWDAR for 1950, pp. 30-21; SWDAR for 1951, pp. 35-37; SWDAR for 1952, p. 19.

When she was with the Social Welfare Department from 1955 to 1956, Ann Wee recalled working for some months in a "huge" Public Assistance Section.[83] This was a direct result of the expansion. The average number of cases per month for 1951 was around 2,700; in 1952, it was about 4,200.[84] Expenditure unavoidably increased to over $900,000 in 1952, whereas the year before it was just under $400,000. In 1953, annual expenditure was just shy of $2.5 million for an average of 6,800 cases per month.[85]

Hence, a substantial bureaucracy of labor and machinery was needed to investigate and process applications. The task was not made easier by the physical terrain of 1950s Singapore. Each time a public assistance investigator went out to assess their cases, they were liable to have a "wonderful geographical experience" as they traversed a mind-boggling maze of addresses marked not by orderly numbers, but by physical landmarks.

> They had their own maps because people didn't have addresses and it was sort of along part of the railings till you [come] to the drain and then you had to walk on the pipe to cross the drain. Then you went on to the temple. We went round the back of the temple till you came to the right shop then you just had to ask the right people. The wall of the investigators' room was covered with maps of how you meandered your way through Lorong 3 and so on. It was an incredible world.[86]

Ann also recalled how "[in] many of the houses [in Jurong] there [was] somebody wheezing. It seemed as if the whole of that Jurong vegetable area had a lot of asthmatic problems". She observed that while there was "much destitution", elderly recipients of Public Assistance were actually in the minority. "In those days the problem was young families where even the most diligent breadwinner couldn't get a job. Everybody seemed to be living on odd jobs".[87]

Yeo Lee Hock joined the Social Welfare Department in 1966 as an investigator in the Public Assistance Section. He remembered similar off-road adventures trying to locate addresses in rural Singapore, and also recalled hostile reactions to his intrusive but necessary queries. "They ask you, why ask so many things? You want to give, give lah, don't give, don't ask so many things lah. But they didn't know that this is our duty to ask".[88] Witnessing firsthand the desperate levels poverty and destitution moved Yeo to action. He recalled that

[83] NAS OHC, Ann Wee, reel 2.
[84] SWDAR for 1952. Including the other relief funds managed by the Social Welfare Department, each of the twelve investigators had an average caseload of over 450 cases per month.
[85] SWDAR for 1953, p. 7.
[86] NAS OHC, Ann Wee, reel 2.
[87] NAS OHC, Ann Wee, reel 2.
[88] NAS OHC, Yeo Lee Hock. The Public Service - A Retrospection. Accession Number 002220. Interviewed in 1999. Reel 2 (of 7).

"these people are so poor…. Some of them, they were without any food…." So he felt moved on several occasions to take immediate action:

> So sometimes as an investigator, you felt the compassion to help…. You don't just talk about it you see. So sometimes on our own we have to just [give] a few dollars that we have, we say, "Come, this is for you". Our own pockets…. So to [tide] them over while the investigation [was on-going].[89]

Juvenile Delinquency and Probation

In the event that one of H's elder siblings was caught engaging in an illegal activity, he or she would then come into contact with the Social Welfare Department's Probation Services. Probation became a "statutory form of treatment for children and young persons" under the Children and Young Persons Ordinance of 1949, though informal probation services had been in place since the establishment of the Juvenile Court in early 1946.[90] It was not until 1948, with the return to Singapore of a local officer sent to London to train in probation work and the arrival of an experienced probation officer from Britain's Home Ministry, that work began in earnest in creating a proper probation system.[91] Initially, probation services were limited to juveniles, but the final version of the Probation of Offenders Ordinance in 1951 expanded the scope to include adults as well. By then, the Probation Section consisted of a Principal Probation Officer and three other Probation Officers. In 1953, only three more probation officers were added to the section, bringing the total number to seven – but still three short of the number projected in the Five-Year Plan. Each officer was handling an average of at least forty cases.[92]

An underlying intent of probation was to allow for differentiation between actual and potential criminals, as well as to provide another avenue for the dislocated youth in postwar

[89] NAS OHC, Yeo Lee Hock, reel 2. The duration of the investigation depended on various circumstances. "Well, the investigation depends on how fast you do it, how fast you can get the information. Sometimes within three days, sometimes within one week you can finish the investigation. After that you have to write the report. Then the case if approved, then they will come and collect the money and all that…."
[90] NAS, SWD 694D/51. Annual report of Juvenile Court and Probation Section 1951.
[91] *The Third Report*, p. 12. Local officer was Flight Lieutenant Tan Kay Hai, D.F.C. (b.1914), a former reconnaissance pilot with the Royal Air Force. He enlisted after the fall of France in 1940 and left Singapore for Canada in November 1941. He took part in Operation Overlord on 6 June 1944, and was shot down later. He was interned as a prisoner-of-war but managed to escape during the confusion at the end of the war. He returned to Singapore in 1945 as a minor celebrity (*The Straits Times*, 18 September 1945, "First Straits Chinese To Win D.F.C."), and eventually found employment with the new Social Welfare Department in 1946. For his wartime exploits, see Ernest Koh, "The Chinese of Singapore and their imperial Second World War 1939 – 1945". *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies*, Vol. 5 (2011-12), pp. 57-78.
[92] SWDAR for 1953, pp. 13.

Singapore. Mary Quintal was a former prosecutor in the Juvenile Court. She remembered most of the crimes committed by juveniles were relatively minor, such as "stealing bicycles" or getting caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, such as a gang fight with weapons. She continued:

> [They] don't really prosecute or persecute the child. Parents, one of the parents or guardian must attend so that he or she could listen to what is being presented in the court…. The procedure is exactly like the other courts; the only thing is dealing with juveniles. We dealt with them more gently and not like criminals. They are just children who've done wrong and you try and lead them in the right path. If they are guilty we just tell them, "You are guilty", and we call for a probation report….[93]

Juvenile court proceedings were very much "like an ordinary discussion, you question, there's no harassment, no threatening attitudes sort of thing". Quintal recalled working very closely with defense lawyers, especially those who were unaware of caveats in the "Juvenile Act" that allowed for no punishment even with a guilty plea: "We advised what is best for the child, for the person involved…. If he's [the offender] got a good job, it's his first offence and the parents promised to supervise him better, the magistrate would acquit".[94]

The Social Welfare Department's unpublished monthly progress summaries were more detailed and candid about "closed" (usually satisfactory) and "failure" cases. The majority of probation cases generally stemmed from having to deal with broken homes or an unstable family situation, such as where one or both parents were missing, parents who were unable to support the family for various reasons, a family with multiple spouses and different children, or children with adoptive parents. There was a case where a boy came from a slightly indulgent environment.[95] Son to his father's second wife, "the atmosphere in the home then became more strained" after his father took a third wife. Already spoiled by his mother, the boy "began to associate with bad company" and stole from his parents. He was placed on probation for two years and admitted into a boarding school. When he stole again, his father's pleas persuaded the Juvenile Court to extend his probation period. But his parents separated soon after and his behavior worsened to such an extent that he was finally placed in the Gimson School for Boys.

[93] NAS OHC, Mary Quintal Tshu En (nee Voon). The Public Service – A Retrospection. Accession Number 002219. Interviewed in 1999. Reel 4 (of 5).
[94] NAS OHC, Mary Quintal, reel 4.
[95] NUSCL, CO 1030/268. Progress Summary for February 1955.

Another probationer, B, similarly had a less stable home environment. Raised by his grandmother till her death, B had problems adjusting to living with his natural parents and siblings. He was thirteen years old when he stole a neighbor's bicycle. Sentenced to two years of probation, he absconded three months before the end of his two-year probation, despite being relocated to a hostel and his probation officer's efforts to find him employment. The report observed that the boy as a "rejected child, often feels insecure and unhappy", projecting his "shortcomings onto an imaginary hostile world. Everyone is against him and he therefore retaliates".[96] Probation officers also seem to have relatively less success with probationers who were members of secret societies, even with those who appeared to be cooperating well with the officer.[97]

They were not all "failure" cases however. Such instances demonstrated how the presence of the probation officer prevented more severe consequences, such as remanded in an approved school or even imprisonment. Statistics of "closed" and "failure" cases moreover do not always tell the whole story. Sometimes, the relationship between the probation officer and probationer continued long after the case was closed. In one case, a probation officer had established a two-year relationship with the probationer. After the latter was sentenced to two years' imprisonment (for stealing a bicycle on top of a dozen prior convictions), the officer visited him in prison, taking the opportunity to "assist and befriend" him, and laid out the choices the former probationer had made that led him to imprisonment. Upon his release, he sought out the officer for help to leave Singapore and find a job in the Federation of Malaya as he did not have friends who were not ex-prisoners.[98] The Probation Section started small, supervising juveniles below sixteen years of age. By the late 1950s, the service expanded to include young adults up to the age of twenty-one and adult, a group that also included discharged prisoners, "namely corrective trainees and preventive detainees" and reformative trainees.[99] The section became a fully developed probation and aftercare service within the Social Welfare Department from 1964.

[96] NUSCL, CO 1030/268. Progress Summary for December 1954.
[97] NUSCL, CO 1030/268. See cases reported in Progress Summary for September and October 1954.
[98] SWDAR for 1954, pp. 23-24. A similar instance of a probation officer going beyond his usual scope of responsibilities, see NUSCL, CO 1030/268. Progress Summary for June 1954.
[99] Veloo, *Social Worker*, p. 110. See also K. V. Veloo, *Juvenile Delinquency in Singapore, 1961-1980: Trends, Programmes and Outcome of Probation and Discharges* (Singapore: Dept. of Social Work and Psychology, National University of Singapore, 2004).

Counseling and Advice

Financial woes were oft times merely the tip of an iceberg of deeper underlying issues within a family, necessitating a more holistic and sometimes more intrusive approach. For instance, using H's case, advice and counseling services would have been necessary for his mother, such as to inform her of the laws that empowered the Social Welfare Department to temporarily place her son in a home, her legal rights in such a situation, and perhaps to even counsel her on coping with family pressures. Since its inception, the Department, mainly through its Citizens Advice and Missing Persons Bureaus (both legacies from the British Military Administration), had been providing advice and information to enquiries received from general public. From 1952, with the return of Monie Sundram (1919-1983) from London as a trained barrister, the Department's counseling and advice service expanded considerably. "Monie", as known affectionately by close friends, was Singapore's first "Poor Man's Lawyer".

Described by the Colonial Office as someone with a "real sense of vocation", Monie was a good example of the "faceless" government official working diligently behind the scenes.[100] A graduate (with a diploma in education) from Raffles College in 1939, he was a teacher before he joined the War Tax Department at the outbreak of the Second World War. After the war, he and other colleagues formed the nucleus of the Emergency Relief Center at Victoria Memorial Hall, which in turn housed the new Social Welfare Department in June 1946. He was put in charge of the Relief Section, was also involved in the 1947 social survey and in the earliest discussions of social security for Singapore. In 1948, Monie received a scholarship to read law at Gray's Inn in England for four years and was successfully called to the Bar in 1952.[101] Monie's qualifications allowed the Social Welfare Department to adopt a more professional approach to its counseling and advice services. He dealt with the more "technical" legal enquiries that went to a reorganized Counselling and Advice Section established in 1954. Another colleague addressed cases that did not immediately come under any legislation the Department enforces, such as marriage counseling, family disputes and

[100] NUSCL, CO 1030/270. As described by W. H. Chinn during fourth meeting of the Advisory Committee on Social Development in Colonial Territories, 19 July 1954 (extracted).
[101] Information taken from *The Straits Times*, 13 August 1983, "T.F. Hwang takes you down memory lane". Monie Sundram passed away in Leeds, England, in 1983.

maintenance issues).[102] Together, the Section provided the following services: "legal assistance of a technical nature given by the Poor Man's Lawyer; counseling in marriage disputes; advice in family disputes and maintenance cases and other domestic problems; an information and enquiry service; the issue of presumption of Death Certificates; liaison with hospital almoners and voluntary agencies".[103] Legal aid was also formally established for the poor. The neat demarcation of services hides a diverse range of overlapping cases and enquiries. In February 1954, the Counselling and Advice Section dealt with over two hundred enquiries. The following are some examples taken from progress summary for the month.

In 1953, a "Miss Y" had approached the Social Welfare Department "for advice in the matter of marrying X". She had done so because she had lost contact with her parents (during the war) and had no guardian to give the necessary consent. The Social Welfare Department arranged for "a clinical and radiological examination conducted by a Government medical officer" to establish Miss Y was of age (and did not require parental or guardian consent), and she was able to marry X.[104]

A Malay laborer sought assistance claiming insurance for an injury sustained in an accident, as he had a major role in causing the accident. The Social Welfare Department acted as an intermediary, explaining to the insurance company the circumstances the laborer had found himself in: "that he was now drawing public assistance benefits, the full pay leave granted by his employer having expired …. [and] he was still undergoing physiotherapy treatment and would probably be unfit for work for some weeks. He had a wife and three children to support". The insurance company then offered "an ex-gratia payment on compassionate grounds" without admitting liability, which was accepted.

A (different) Mrs. X, in a "state of acute mental distress", sought legal advice after receiving a solicitor's letter on behalf of her husband. The latter was seeking the return of his "personal effects and furniture" in the midst of separating from his wife. Mrs. X had thought existing differences did not "merit a severance of the union". The Social Welfare Department again acted as intermediary, responded to the solicitors requesting a meeting between the two.

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[102] The Assistant Secretary (Legal) was filled initially by Reverend Yeh Hua Fen. Ann Wee recalled taking over (de facto) sometime in 1956, most likely when Rev. Yeh suffered a stroke in July 1956. Hear Ann Wee's oral history, reel 2. Also referenced in by Cromwell in personal letter to parents, 3 July 1956.

[103] NUSCL, CO 1030/268. Progress Summary for February 1954.

[104] NUSCL, CO 1030/268. Progress Summary for February 1954. The story had a happier ending, as the now Mrs. X was successfully reunited with her parents in July 1953. She wrote back to the Social Welfare Department the following year: "I wish to thank the Department of Social Welfare for the happiness it has brought into my life. I led and uncertain and lonely childhood not knowing whether my parents were alive or dead. Now I have a husband who loves me, and my heart is full of joy at having found my parents and brothers and sisters".

By the second meeting, "the stiff and unyielding attitude … gradually evaporated", and it appeared that reconciliation was possible. Another case was not that successful, as one party refused to "budge from her original stand" despite "eminently reasonable proposals" by the husband.

The following case is quoted in full to properly appreciate some of the more off-beat enquiries received:

> Mrs. A left Mr. A refusing to share their home with her mother-in-law. Mr. A wrote several letters to her entreating her to return and offering to make arrangements for his mother to live elsewhere, but Mrs. A refused to accept anything short of an undertaking that he would have nothing further to do with his mother. The essence of the offence of willfully refusing or neglecting to maintain one's family is the *mens rea* (intention). There is no such offence when a husband gives a wife a bona fide offer to return to his home.

It seems that the wife had gone to the Social Welfare Department enquiring if the husband was guilty of neglecting or failing to support her.

The above (and more) was handled by the Assistant Secretary (Legal). A further hundred and fifty "new and old disputes" were handled by the Assistant Secretary (Counselling) in the same month. Those included "disputes between husband and wife, family disputes between parents and children, maintenance and custody cases, broken engagements, unmarried mothers, uncontrollable children, wage and compensation claims, applications for [Singapore Improvement] Trust accommodation, tenancy and many other disputes…."[105] Some were as mundane as ensuring the enquiry reached the appropriate government department to resolve the issues at hand. Others were more complicated, necessitating at times intimate knowledge of particular norms and culture, relevant languages, and often times a fair amount of patience. Janet Yee recalled several moments when language acted as an obstacle (with humorous results) and as a connection. Once, attempting to speak Cantonese, she inadvertently asked about a "mother chicken" instead of the "mother of the family". In another instance, she managed to convince a hitherto stubborn male client to finally pay maintenance for his daughter. He only agreed after being "touched" by Janet's advice and pleas, which was spoken in lyrical Teochew.[106]

[105] NUSCL, CO 1030/268. Progress Summary for February 1954.
[106] What Janet said roughly translates to "Even if your nose smells, you cannot cut it off. She's your own daughter whom you have to raise". NAS OHC, Janet Yee, reel 2. For an examination of causes of family disputes, see Janet Yee Keng Luan, "Disputes among Singapore Chinese families" (Unpublished academic exercise - Dept. of Social Studies, University of Malaya, 1960).

Medical-related Needs

The work of the almoner, or medical social worker, was not that much different. Almoners were key if understated contributors to Singapore's social welfare history. Despite its generic nomenclature, the Social Welfare Department did not cover all of society's well-being. It did not cover all possible social contingencies a child might have, as the legislation its officers enforced focused more on juvenile crime, juvenile prostitution, human trafficking, and physical abuse (as and when reported). Moreover, the scope and meaning of social welfare work evolved as more trained social workers tackled the myriad social issues afflicting postwar Singapore society. The social needs of a medical patient and his or her family had to be looked after too, despite the obstacles. Cecilia Nayar experienced similar linguistic difficulties, not knowing much Mandarin or any of the Chinese dialects in a Chinese-majority society.[107] Daisy Vaithilingam also initially found "very distressing" the Chinese practice of not taking back the body of a younger person after they died.[108]

As seen previously, individual members of society initiated civic action to address the health and social needs of the mother and to provide more protection for the abused child. The almoners were also responsible for establishing new services and organizations to address the social needs arising from medical and health situations. One example was the fostering scheme. It was started by Daisy Vaithilingam after seeing many children with physical disabilities. She recalled that "the Children's unit we had lots of children who were mentally handicapped, severely handicapped to an extent that they couldn't walk, they couldn't do anything…."[109] When Daisy returned to Singapore in 1954, the almoner's service was really still in its infancy. The number of orphanages in Singapore was small, let alone institutions dedicated to children with specific needs. Daisy recalled there were not many options for her young charges.

> When I was in pediatrics, they had a lot of children who were left, as I said, in the hospital and we didn't know what to do with them. We couldn't trace their parents. There was no institution to put them in. The Social Welfare Department didn't want to have them. They did have a little home for retarded children [at New Market Road] and it was full. Occasionally we could get a child into that institution. Then Woodbridge Hospital [under the Medical Department] had a home, and they had a ward for mentally handicapped

[107] NAS OHC, Cecilia Nayar, reel 3.
[108] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, reel 3.
[109] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, reel 4.

> children, where they had low IQ, where they were not mentally ill, but they were retarded. And we could get some of the children in there.[110]

Earlier attempts to solicit support for dedicated homes and schools for children with disabilities did not progress far (or quickly).[111] The matter gained more publicity in 1952, when Elizabeth Milne, an almoner at the General Hospital, appealed for assistance for an eleven-year old boy suffering from severe malnourishment and neglect.[112] The Social Welfare Department managed to open a small home (for thirty children) in August 1952.[113] But there were many more in the hospital wards. So, much like Beng Neo and Mah Keong in their respective fields of work, Daisy made effective use of what was available (and who was willing to help). She had noticed that some of the hospital attendants were

> very good at looking after these small babies, who were retarded. So I talked to them and I said, "Would you be prepared to take these children home and look after them, if we give a certain sum of money to cover your expenses for the food, and some money for your trouble?" They said, "Yes". So this was how the foster-care scheme started. So, it was with many of the attendants, the women, the female amahs, would agree to take the child…. Instead of taking up space in the wards, they would take the child home…. A lot of them had got quite attached to the children, for they had remained in the ward for a long time. So they were quite happy to take them home.[114]

As the scheme expanded, the almoners collaborated with the Social Welfare Department to ensure potential foster parents were properly assessed. The latter took the scheme over completely in April 1956.[115]

Daisy Vaithilingam lobbied hard for recognition and support for children with specific needs, needs that society at large might not always be aware of. She worked with the

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[110] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, reel 4.

[111] The movement for a home for crippled children began in 1948. Progress was excruciatingly slow as financial support as well as available land was not immediately forthcoming. The home only opened in February 1953 (under the auspices of the Singapore branch of the Red Cross). *The Straits Times*, 17 August 1948, "Corrective Home Needed in Colony"; *The Singapore Free Press*, 15 October 1948, "Fete gets $25,000 for the children"; *The Straits Times*, 24 November 1951, "Start on home for crippled children"; *The Straits Times*, 31 May 1952, "More cash needed to help these children"; *The Straits Times*, 7 July 1952, "Crippled children to get new home"; *The Straits Times*, 4 February 1953, "The Children met a Countess".

[112] *The Straits Times*, 31 January 1952, "Hapless 11-year-old", and *The Straits Times*, 12 February 1952, "$100 for the boy nobody wants".

[113] From October 1952, the Social Welfare Department began to admit children with intellectual disabilities into a dedicated home located at New Market Road (next to the Havelock Road building). See *The Singapore Free Press*, 11 August 1952, "Govt. Care for Sick Children", *The Straits Times*, 16 October 1952, "Welfare Home for Post-Polio Children".

[114] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, reel 4.

[115] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, reel 4. See SWDAR for 1958, p. 23. Hear also reel 3 of Janet Yee's oral history. After she finished her diploma course in 1959, she returned to the Social Welfare Department as a childcare officer staffing the fostering scheme.

Education and Social Welfare Departments, and directly with the schools, to ensure that children with physical disabilities were still able to have an education.[116] She arranged for teachers to come down to the hospital wards to teach those who could not yet be discharged, to ensure "that they would not be at a disadvantage" when they could leave.[117] Daisy thought the substantial numbers of children with physical disabilities was due to various medical conditions. She mentioned polio, "TB of the bones, meningitis which is an infection of the brain, which was left with a physical or mental handicap … and there was encephalitis and also malnutrition, which left a lot of them handicapped both physically and mentally".[118] The problem (and the absence of any immediate remedy) was sufficiently vexing to prompt action to help children with mental disabilities. Support was obtained from the Rotary Club and the Singapore Children's Society, and in 1961, a one-room "school" for twenty-six children was opened. It was called Towner Chin Pu – the latter two words a direct English transliteration of the Chinese characters for "improvement". The following year, the Singapore Association for Retarded Children was formally established with Daisy acting as the Secretary of the new voluntary organization.[119]

The chronically ill, especially those without family in Singapore, was another group that necessitated advocacy on their behalf. Daisy recalled how doctors, sometimes through no fault of their own, would send these patients to the almoner because hospital beds were in short supply and medically speaking, nothing else could be done for them. But problems arose if medical aftercare was still needed after discharge. She recalled:

> [T]here were a lot of single, older people who lived in lodging houses, shared [between] five, six, seven, eight of ten people in a room in Chinatown. If that person falls ill and he will be flat out on his back, who is going to look after him?[120]

[116] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, reel 4. The Social Welfare Department provided transportation. She recalled a heart-warming example of a school principal ensuring an entire class remained on the ground floor (as classes moved up a physical level as they graduated each education level) so as to allow a child who was unable to climb stairs to attend lessons within the same group of students.
[117] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, reel 4. She recalled how happy she and her colleagues were when all the children they were responsible for finished their education. "Our objective was [not only] to get handicapped children into the normal school, but to get them to a level where they could compete in the normal school".
[118] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, reel 4.
[119] It was renamed the Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS) in 1985, which is still in existence today. For a brief overview of its historical milestones, see "About Us", http://www.minds.org.sg/AboutUs.html. Accessed 21 July 2015. Reel 5 of Daisy Vaithilingam's oral history contains her recollections in setting up the voluntary organization.
[120] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, reel 5.

The almoners tapped on the existing network of community hospitals, lodgings and even temples that the chronic sick could turn to. They arranged for financial grants to such places to help take care of their patients, and for locations that needed more facilities (like the temples), solicited financial support to pay for nurses, attendants, cooks, and other materials for their patients' comfort. In many ways, they were creating a "semi-nursing home" on temple grounds. The main problem was that "there was never a time when you could find a home immediately", despite the number of community hospitals and lodgings available.[121] The almoners' hopes for a hospital dedicated to the chronically ill were cruelly dashed when the Thomson Road Hospital, originally built for such a purpose, was converted instead into a general-purpose hospital.[122]

Social Welfare and Nation-building in the Late Colonial State

The above provides particular insights into social welfare work, from the personal memories of the social welfare officer and professional social worker, and from recorded cases of received help. The types of issues that brought both sides into contact ranged from the mundane, such as seeking information, financial relief, or protection from abuse, to the more complex, such as helping a probationer, resolving family issues, or initiating schemes and organizations to address a pressing social need. In doing so, contact was made and maintained, between the social welfare officer and their clients, between social welfare officers and social workers or almoners, or between social workers and government and society at large. All of which created a physicality that lent structure not only to an increasingly prominent Social Welfare Department, but also gave coherence to a nascent social welfare state in late colonial Singapore.[123] Given the very personal and focused nature of those bonds, it is unlikely they consciously thought their work contributed to the broader processes of state- or nation-building. Especially after the communal feeding program, the

[121] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, reel 6.
[122] NAS OHC, Daisy Vaithilingam, reel 6. Daisy was at the ground breaking ceremony and said she was "very heartbroken" when she heard the news. The Thomson Road Hospital is the predecessor to the present-day Changi General Hospital.
[123] This is a theme, framed in a straightforward interpretation of nation-building (the process of building and sustaining the Singapore nation), which has appeared recently in local social work circles. See for instance Ang Bee Lian, "The Soul of Nation Building in Singapore: Contributions from Social Work", in David Chan (ed.), *50 Years of Social Issues in Singapore* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co., 2015), chapter 8. Ang is a social worker the current (at time of writing) Director of Social Welfare within the Ministry of Social and Family Development. The chapter builds on a 2011 speech entitled "The Role of Social Work Professionals in Nation-building", presented at the Singapore Association of Social Workers' 40th Anniversary Symposium, 2011. www.ncss.gov.sg/About_NCSS/download_file.asp?speechid=106. Accessed 10 December 2015.

Social Welfare Department's scope was limited to specific sections of society, such as the old and the very young, the indigent and destitute, the delinquent and others perceived to be vulnerable and at risk of bad social influences.

Even so, by the eve of political independence from British colonialism, the Social Welfare Department, or at least the services it provided, was familiar to Singapore society. As evident by some of the cases handled by the Counselling and Advice Section, people knew where to go for assistance and advice, even if their needs might be rather mundane. Earlier chapters have also demonstrated societal awareness of the Social Welfare Department. In 1951, someone knew enough of the Social Welfare Department to tell Ah Meng, the little girl encountered in Chapter 4, to seek refuge there. During the mid-1950s, an almoner and a parish priest assisting Augustin Gomez and Valentine Frois respectively also knew where to turn to for the financial and other social assistance their clients required. By the end of the decade, long queues outside the Social Welfare Department along Havelock Road waiting to collect their Public Assistance allowances were a common sight.[124]

Increasing awareness of the Social Welfare Department was not due solely to the work its officers performed. Affiliated organizations and institutions, with their own structures and work processes, also played significant roles in adding tangibility to the social welfare state. Members of the Social Welfare Council, most of whom were providers of social welfare in their own way, were regularly briefed on the Department's activities and services. The Council might not have been as effective as initially hoped for, but as a platform for discussion, questions, and the occasional calling to attention of particular social needs or to an individual in need, the Council helped maintained a focus on the needs of Singapore society. The students and faculty of the Social Studies Diploma program also increased awareness and the physicality of the social welfare state in their own way. In the search for more local knowledge and for placements for their students, faculty members maintained close ties to the Social Welfare Departments in Singapore and in Malaya, the Social Welfare Council (and later the Singapore Council of Social Service), religious bodies, and voluntary organizations, such as the Singapore Children's Society and Family Planning Association, and even commercial and business organizations. Each of those engaged with the different needs aspects of Singapore society, through their clients, their employees and their

[124] See for instance accompanying photo in *The Straits Times*, 13 February 1958, "Soon-an end to this queue for dole". Ann Wee notes that the Social Welfare Department then might not have been known to everyone, but everyone seemed to know about Public Assistance. (Personal communication). See Chapter 7 for expansion of Public Assistance as part of Singapore's search for social security during the 1950s.

dependents. Some of the diploma students were already members of the Social Welfare Department, and were hence in a position to advise or even render preliminary assistance in the course of interviewing their research subjects. Others were exposed to the social services available through their practical placements, and took that knowledge into their work as social workers, almoners, or social welfare officers.

All of these served to buttress a nascent social welfare state, first through awareness that certain social services exist, and then utilizing those services either by referring someone in need to the appropriate person or department, or by rendering assistance directly. The Social Welfare Department acted as a conduit for these processes, such as receiving referrals, hearing and investigating cases, and then provided the appropriate assistance or service. To be sure, the Department did not set out to replace existing support networks maintained by the various communities in Singapore, but it did position itself as central to social welfare activities. To some extent, this built on the non-partisan, inclusive approach introduced earlier by the Rotary Club and the Salvation Army, which was then interrupted by the war.

Colonial Nation-building

This was perhaps the point where the expansion of local social welfare networks and processes met the broader policy objectives of colonial development and welfare, which was to mend the fault-lines of a plural society and to create a more cohesive community. The structures, processes, and networks introduced and then painstakingly maintained by social welfare officers, social workers, and their affiliates, laid the foundations to facilitate community development and to prepare for the next stage, nation-building. It is in this context we turn our attention to the would-be policymakers, the heads of the Social Welfare Department, in particular Percy McNeice and Tom Cromwell, respectively the first and last colonial Secretaries for Social Welfare.

Chapter 4 has earlier recounted McNeice's efforts to put an untried department on a firm foundation, first via the communal feeding program and the deliberate use of print media, and then through broader platforms, such as the regional social welfare conference, the social survey and the Five-Year Plan. His experiences however differed from those highlighted in this chapter. In his oral history recorded in 1981, when queried on the social conditions that might have required a social welfare department, McNeice could not immediately think of any particular reason. He cited generally the ill-treatment of children,

abandoned wives, or needs that required financial assistance, and then commented: "But you couldn't say that there was any widespread poverty or anything of that sort that required government action".[125] He then recounted again his memories of the feeding schemes, and in doing so, perhaps demonstrated the more pressing issues, for him at least, were dealing with food shortages and countering the black market.[126] Even though they had all been working in the same department, McNeice's memories demonstrates a different, slightly aloof experience of the higher-level policymaker, relative to the direct and regular engagement with various kinds of poverty the home superintendent, the youth service officer, or the case investigator had. He then concluded:

> But other than [that] the Social Welfare Department was intended just to cater for anything that might arise involving hardship to people, involving cruelty to children involving exploitation. Possibly merely requiring the help of the Department to tell the applicant where to go in order to get whatever it was they needed.[127]

McNeice's oral history also gives the distinct impression that the Social Welfare Department acted mainly in a residual manner, and continued the work of the prewar Chinese Protectorate:

> The work of the Social Welfare Department had been very largely covered by the Chinese Protectorate [before the war]. And I supposed maybe the words "Chinese Protectorate" possibly had an implication that the Chinese needed protection. Anyway the words "Chinese Protectorate" were to my recollection hardly used at all after the war…. [L]ooking back, I think that probably the words "Social Welfare" were substituted for Chinese Protectorate.[128]

The interviewer attempted to clarify if the Social Welfare Department was "formed to cater to everybody, not the Chinese only?" McNeice replied:

> Yes, oh yes. But then since the bulk of the population is Chinese… and even under the Chinese Protectorate, we didn't deal exclusively with Chinese. There were cases where Malays were involved and we would deal with those

[125] NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 13.
[126] NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 14. He noted that Singapore's situation was similar to England during the same period (1946-1948), where "rationing was very strict, you couldn't buy meat, you couldn't buy well, kinds of things. So there were certainly no food in Europe that was available to be sent out here to the East".
[127] NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 14. McNeice's oral history interview did not cover the conference, social survey and the Five-Year Plan. As the purpose of the interview revolves around McNeice's time as an internee during the war and then as President of the City Council, those moments were conspicuously absent in the oral account.
[128] NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 14.

> as well. The same way as women and girls' protection if we found…a Malay girl who had been lured into immoral earnings or anything like that….[129]

McNeice did not recollect any deliberate discrimination according to ethnicity, just a matter of addressing more prominent issues in a Chinese-majority society and adjusting according to the situation at hand.[130] The case summaries in the monthly progress and annual reports were not usually identified by their ethnicity or language, unless it was relevant to how the case was being handled, such as ensuring the needs of Muslims in the various homes. Functions moreover were focused on needs in general, not the needs of particular communities. Whenever differences arose, usually concerning religious practices, it was stated factually that individual practices were accommodated as far as possible.[131] It is perhaps a side effect of policy implementation that the needs of the majority are usually catered to first. This does not immediately mean however that the needs of the minority were intentionally ignored; they could have simply been in a blind spot until highlighted.

Thomas Pearson Cromwell was the last colonial Secretary for Social Welfare, joining the Social Welfare Department in October 1953, and oversaw its transition from a colonial to a partial self-governing administration.[132] The Colonial Office noted in 1954 that the "Department of Social Welfare in Singapore was highly organized" but "suffered from a lack of continuity in leadership", having had "six heads in seven years".[133] While the

[129] NAS OHC, Percy McNeice, reel 13.
[130] He went on to point out that the Labour Department mostly dealt with the Tamils (MCS officers sent to India to learn Tamil or Telagu), while Malays came under the purview of the District Officer and had no separate government department tasked to manage its affairs. In 1951, the Colonial Office opened a file entitled "Suggested Establishment of a Secretariat for Malay Affairs in Singapore, to Safeguard the Position of the Malay Community". (NUSCL, CO 1022/429). As a result of events in Singapore, such as a death sentence passed on a rioter during the Maria Hertogh riots and Muslim agitation against a film (*David and Bathsheba*) that supposedly slighted Islam, the Governor of Singapore asked for a discussion at a Malaya / Borneo Governors Conference meeting. The meeting agreed some form of action should be taken, as the Singapore Malays, "a small leaderless, depressed class", should not fall prey to Indonesian and Communist agitators. However, there is no evidence of a follow-up and the file was archived almost devoid of documents.
[131] For instance, Tan Beng Neo had to ensure Maria Hertogh's religious needs were met during the latter's stay in York Hill (which incidentally also coincided with holy month of Ramadan). Those included separate cooking facilities and helping her to observe the fasting period.
[132] Cromwell was trained for work in Chinese affairs. He arrived in Malaya in 1932 and worked in various positions for the Chinese Protectorate. When war broke out, he was the District Officer for Christmas Island (usually an official from the Chinese Protectorate due to Chinese labor). Cromwell survived a mutiny by his Indian soldiers, and was interned in Java and Sulawesi for the remainder of the war (See *The Straits Times*, 4 January 1947, "Questions on White Flag at Mutiny Trial", for his testimony to certain aspects of his involvement. An account of mutiny is given in John Hunt, *Suffering Through Strength: The Men Who Made Christmas Island* (Canberra: J. Hunt, 2011). After the war, he joined the BMA's Chinese Affairs Department, reporting to Victor Purcell, the BMA's Chinese Advisor. Cromwell was involved in conducting a survey of Chinese education in Malaya and Singapore. In 1947, he was posted to Sarawak as an Assistant Secretary of Chinese Affairs, overseeing a portfolio that included social welfare and labor matters until he left in 1953. NAS, SOAS PP MS 33, Cromwell to Parents, 11 November 1945.
[133] NUSCL, CO 1030/270.

Department's work did not suffer too much from the "revolving door"[134] of colonial officers, the promising start made by McNeice and his deputy Eames Hughes from 1946 to 1950 spluttered almost to a halt between 1950 and 1953. The Five-Year Plan fell by the wayside, barely mentioned in the annual reports following 1949 except in the negative. Though certain functions did expand and the Department was well-established, such as Public Assistance, social welfare despite earlier rhetoric and promise seemed low on government priorities.

Cromwell's first impression of the Social Welfare Department was that it was a "spending department", and that it was a potential target for "economies whenever these have to be enforced more rigidly than usual".[135] Cromwell gave his parents a breakdown of his senior staff. It consisted of a Secretary for Social Welfare, a Deputy for Social Welfare, nine Assistant Secretaries, a Lady Assistant Secretary for Women and Children, a Juvenile Court Magistrate and a Superintendent of Homes.[136] There were also Supervisors – one rank below Assistant Secretary – for specific portfolios. Overall the Social Welfare Department employed over 200 people. A dividing line can be discerned between the bureaucratic designations of Assistant Secretary and Supervisor. Until 1954, Supervisor positions were filled mostly by locals (mostly Chinese, with a several Indian or Malay), while the senior positions were filled by the British. It seemed less a racial division than a hierarchy organized by education qualifications. Once locals received a basic degree, they were promoted to Assistant Secretary.[137] As more locals obtained higher qualifications, the senior positions of the Department began to have a more distinctly local flavor. To give a comparison, in his 1948 visit, Chinn observed there were nine Europeans and two locals (one Chinese and one Indian) as senior staff.[138] In 1954, there were six Europeans and seven locals (one Eurasian, one Indian and five Chinese) as senior staff, as local officers began returning from England with graduate and postgraduate degrees.[139]

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[134] See Ann Wee's essay in Barry Desker and Kwa Chong Guan (eds.), *Goh Keng Swee: a public career remembered* (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School for International Studies and World Scientific, 2011).

[135] NAS, SOAS PP MS 33, Cromwell to Parents, 19 October 1953. "There is an Organization and Efficiency Team working out here. It has its eye on "my" department. Meadows says he's staved them off. I wonder how long for?" Copies (in microfilm) available in NAS, with SOAS holding copyright.

[136] NAS, SOAS PP MS 33, Cromwell to Parents, 25 October 1953.

[137] Goh Keng Swee, Monie Sundram, Woon Wah Siang, and others became Assistant Secretaries after their degrees. The issue was not much about rank and recognition, but also of equality in pay and allowances. See Turnbull and Yeo for overview of Council of Joint Action.

[138] NAS, CSO 2031/49. Chinn also foresaw the vulnerability of having MCS officers in senior positions as they were transferable to other departments in Singapore or even the Federation of Malaya, as happened to McNeice and Eames Hughes.

[139] SWDAR for 1954, Appendix IV, p. 57. They were Tan Kay Hai, Carl de Souza, Kismet Wong, Goh Keng Swee, Monie Sundram, Gertrude Guok, and Rev. Yeh Hua Fen. Supervisor positions were mostly local, predominantly with Chinese names.

In Chapter 5, we glimpsed Cromwell's single-mindedness in paving the way for a new social service council. Similarly, he wasted no time reorganizing the Social Welfare Department. Flagging efforts at promoting youth welfare, encumbered by the slow development of youth clubs in previous years, were reinvigorated with fresh personnel. A position for a Principal Youth Service Officer was created, and new youth officers like Janet Yee were hired. The expertise of existing youth club leaders was also utilized more efficiently. Withdrawn from full-time club duties at particular clubs, they were instead given geographical areas of responsibility where their experience in establishing and developing youth clubs was spread out amidst different neighborhoods and communities. This arrangement boosted the numbers of youth clubs exponentially, from eleven in 1953 to twenty-five, with another eleven in the process of formation, in 1954.[140] A liaison officer position was also created as part of the reorganization to coordinate with hospital almoners and voluntary agencies, and later to facilitate visits from international dignitaries. In line with earlier attempts to better publicize the Department, a pamphlet entitled "The Work of the Social Welfare Department", was produced in 1954 and then updated in 1956.[141]

Cromwell exerted considerable, if slightly misguided, efforts to create a distinct identity for the Social Welfare Department, resulting in abortive attempts to get his staff to use a distinctive Department symbol and flag.[142] He also initiated a new Five-Year development plan for the years 1957 to 1962. The plan was never published, and never mentioned in departmental annual reports or available monthly progress summaries. At the time of writing, I have only seen one rough draft of the second Five-Year Plan. It was undated, but accompanied by a memo dated September 1955 asking department staff to read before a meeting to discuss the plan.[143] The 1955 plan was similar to the first Five-Year Plan of 1949, focused as it did on building projects and staffing requirements. But with the Social Welfare Department already in its tenth year, there was a key difference. The draft plan

[140] SWDAR for 1954, p. 16.
[141] NAS, PRO 10. Copies of 1954 and 1956 versions can be found inside. "The purpose of this pamphlet is to explain the work which the Social Welfare Department undertakes at its present stage of development in order that voluntary bodies, charitable associations, benevolent individuals, almoners and members of other Government departments may have a ready reference when persons in need of welfare help of some kind appeal to them for assistance and they have to be directed to this Department".
[142] Images can be found in NAS, SWD 258/55. The Social Welfare Department emblem was supposed to be the *qi lin* (麒麟), a Chinese mythical creature with lion and dragon-like features, and set against a green background for a possible flag. Cromwell even had department vehicles painted green so as to have a distinct presence during relief operations and everyday duties. He described his fruitless efforts in a letter to his parents dated 15 September 1957.
[143] NAS, SWD 328/55. Social Welfare Department Five Year Plan 1957 - 1962.

argued that the Social Welfare Department "should ... no longer be concerned with residual needs", a reference to its role in overseeing functions not otherwise provided by government or "private agencies". Instead, it "should be concerned with social development and take a positive part in the construction of a society more in harmony with the political physical and economic environment of today".[144] The language used could be seen as tacit acknowledgment of the limits and residual nature of the Social Welfare Department's core functions, such as financial relief, rehabilitation of delinquents or the care and protection of women and children. That it should take a "positive part" in constructing a more harmonious society demonstrated an intent, at least on the part of its author (presumably Cromwell), to take a more proactive role. Cromwell attempted to do this via a redefinition of the community development portfolio the Social Welfare Department took on from 1950.[145]

Community Development

Community development, in the context of the Malayan Emergency being fought in the jungles of the Malayan peninsula, meant "the resettlement of squatters, adult or mass education, or with the co-operative movement".[146] In the Singapore context, it was "a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community, with the active participation and, if possible, on the initiative of the Community...."[147] This manifested primarily via the building of community centers, particularly in the rural areas, and extending the scope of existing children's social centers. In 1953, the Social Welfare Department opened two new community centers in Siglap and Serangoon.[148] Cromwell's plan did not deviate much from initial intent, as it saw the community center as integral "for the fostering

[144] NAS, SWD 328/55. Social Welfare Department Five Year Plan 1957 - 1962.
[145] SWDAR for 1950, pp. 5-19. A Community Development Section was created in 1950, which then rather indiscriminately and haphazardly lumped the youth clubs, children's social centers, children crèches together with the institutional homes. The reorganization separated institutional homes and probation services from the clubs, social centers and crèches.
[146] SWDAR for 1954, p. 1. See also for a detailed personnel movement as result of reorganization, CO 1030/268, annex to January 1954 monthly progress summary. For community development in the African and broader imperial context, see Rosaleen Smyth, "The Roots of Colonial Development in Colonial Office Policy and Practice in Africa". *Social Policy and Administration*, 38:4 (August 2004), pp. 418-436. Smyth commented that the social welfare initiatives introduced in Africa were the colonial counterpart of the Beveridge recommendations in Britain. The initiatives were initially known as adult education, before changing to community development after 1948. Smyth: "Community development at its broadest was about involving people in a community in educating themselves to improve the circumstances of their lives through health, agriculture, civic education and mass literacy schemes".
[147] SWDAR for 1951, p. 33.
[148] SWDAR for 1953, p. 14.

of a spirit of neighbourliness and common citizenship in the present plural society".[149] The draft plan projected for twenty-five community centers by 1962, at a building rate of "two large and three small centres per year". The existing children's social centers – twelve in total (in 1955) – were to form the basis of expansion into "full Community Centres".[150]

The reference to a "common citizenship in the present plural society" is intriguing. It not only alluded to Furnivall's work – the first edition of *Colonial Policy and Practice* had been in circulation for seven years by 1955 – but also boldly challenged the Social Welfare Department to expand beyond its residual functions, and into the realm of nation-building. Cromwell would have undoubtedly been influenced by circumstances in Singapore. Under a section for "Social Centres & Community Development", the draft plan noted "the rapid pace of political change in Singapore on the one hand and on the other the racial complexity of the population", and therefore "urgent measures are required to foster cultural development and the growth of integrated local communities".[151] By 1955, the fault-lines within Singapore society were becoming clearer, particularly in the aftermath of violent events like the Maria Hertogh riots in 1950, as well as election politicking that inadvertently accentuated differences. Moreover, from 1954, the Communists, after suffering setbacks in their jungle insurgency, had switched to United Front tactics in order to capture power constitutionally. Generally speaking, that meant infiltrating, establishing, and influencing trade unions, student associations and political parties. Such tactics played some part in three major clashes between the government, and students and workers, namely the Chinese students protest against the National Service registration drive in 1954, the Hock Lee Bus Company strike and ensuing riot in 1955, and the Chinese Middle Schools unrest in 1956.[152]

It was perhaps a far less violent event that smothered the social welfare developmental plan in its infancy. In April 1955, Singapore took its first step towards self-government when the Labour Front party, led by David Marshall, formed a coalition government that was responsible for several portfolios, including social welfare. This constitutional development changed the working dynamics of the Social Welfare Department vis-à-vis government and society. Whereas before the Department was a stand-alone agency

[149] NAS, SWD 328/55. Social Welfare Department Five Year Plan 1957 - 1962.
[150] NAS, SWD 328/55. Social Welfare Department Five Year Plan 1957 - 1962.
[151] NAS, SWD 328/55. Social Welfare Department Five Year Plan 1957 - 1962.
[152] See Lee Ting Hui, *The Open United Front: The Communist Struggle in Singapore, 1954-1966* (Singapore: South Seas Society, 1996). For a more recent study, see C. C. Chin, "The United Front Strategy of the Malayan Communist Party in Singapore, 1950s-1960s", in Michael Barr and Carl A. Trocki (eds.), *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, c2008).

and the Secretary for Social Welfare reported directly to the Colonial Secretary (or the Officer Administering the Government), the Social Welfare Department became one part of a Ministry of Labour and Welfare. Cromwell became Director of Social Welfare, reporting to a Permanent Secretary, who in turn reported to a Chief Secretary (replacing the Colonial Secretary) as well as advised the Minister for Labour and Welfare.[153]

Hence, Cromwell no longer had the relative freedom his predecessors had in shaping social welfare policy. The restrictions rankled, but not as much as seeing his ambitious plans scuttled. After seeing the Social Welfare Department's budget slashed for the umpteenth time, he could not hold back his feelings.[154] He elaborated and warned of divisive tendencies:

> The amount which the social welfare department is allowed for this (i.e. 1956) year's estimates of new buildings [have] been cut to a literally nominal figure: to all intents and purposes it has been cut down to nil.... I cannot understand the mentality of people who cut down on the very items which would actively promote fellow feeling and good citizenship among the population…. Instead of trying to get people together everything is being done not by the diehard colonial officers but by the new Government, the elected Government, to increase the separatist tendencies of the Malays and the Chinese, obviously from the British connection, but ultimately of course from each other.[155]

It is unfortunate that the departmental annual reports for 1956 and 1957 were not published. The monthly progress summaries, which were still being submitted throughout 1956 and 1957 to the Social Welfare Council and the Colonial Office, presented mainly factual

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[153] One result of the constitutional changes was a confusing situation that led to administrative oversights. One example was the non-publication of the department's annual reports in 1956 and 1957. See NAS, MLL (Labour) 18/58 for internal official attempts to trace reports from 1957 to 1959. Lim Yew Hock wanted the annual reports for the years 1956 and 1957 to be published in time for the 1959 General Election. The issue however was not resolved even after June 1959. Woon Wah Siang finally recommended to publish the 1958 report instead. Reaction by Colonial Office can be found in NUSCL, CO 1030/270, specifically minute by R. Terell, 12 Sept 1958 (p. 26 in file). Cessation of publication was queried, and was speculated that it could have been due to constitutional developments and consequent changes to government structures. Minute did acknowledge a "once and for all pamphlet describing how the department works, written by Miss Guok Assistant Director (Liaison)".

[154] NAS, SOAS PP MS 33. Cromwell to Parents, 2 October 1955. "The sooner I get out of this outfit the better. I am honestly of the opinion that I should be far happier doing some semi-skilled light manual labour of routine clerical work, than I am now kicking against the pricks all the time".

[155] NAS, SOAS PP MS 33. Cromwell to Parents, 2 October 1955 "Not only does Government negatively refuse money for the department, it actively subsidises bodies which it is not Government policy (one would have thought) to help by more than token assistance. The total to be spent as we estimated it on youth welfare and youth service, youth clubs, camps, assistance to scouts guides etc. etc. salaries of Government officers in charge of that work, subsidies etc. came to a certain amount, say X. We were cut to ½X in the first revision of the estimates. It is now one-third X. BUT in the meantime Government has decided to give 5/4X (five quarters of X) to help to set up a Youth Sports Centre, to be run by a non-Government body. And the City Council are giving 5/4X to the same desirable object. It has been on the five year plan to build a Youth Centre (of which activities sports would be one) for years – at a cost of $100,000 dollars. This item has been cut out of the estimates completely, one fortnight after the Singapore Youth Council drew up their requirements for a Youth Centre at Government request. Government here is just nonsense just now".

statements rather than observations. Hence, Cromwell's "items" that would promote "fellow feeling and good citizenship" cannot be fully explored. A letter to his parents, dated July 1955, gives some insight into Cromwell's thinking. He first referenced the "exciting" process of moving people into "suburbs and satellite towns" without many facilities in the beginning.

> My department is responsible for the provision of community centres (so-called). These are intended to provide a building where there is a hall, big enough to play badminton in, with a proper stage for amateur concerts and plays, baby shows, lectures and so on, and rooms in which committees of clubs and societies can meet; provide first aid posts, a telephone, kindergartens (more or less unofficial) and some kind of training for children who can't get into school, facilities for boys and girls, youth clubs and so on…. In short, it is our job to build up a feeling of neighbourliness among people who just happen to be neighbours. This is to replace the clan system, the provincial or village-of-origin society among the Chinese, which are largely dead anyway.[156]

An internal department memo on the "Community Centres in Singapore" dated July 1957, reiterated the potential of the community center. They "[provide] facilities for the development in all sections of the community an interest in, an understanding of, and a sense of responsibility for the life and problems of the community". It caters for all individuals, regardless of "sectional" needs and interests, within the boundary of a neighborhood, and provides a space for the "pursuit of common interests". The memo continued:

> Neighbourhoodliness does not, of itself, necessarily constitute a social bond; but if, by grouping its leisure activities in a recreational and educational centre, a neighbourhood can develope [sic] into a socially conscious community, learning, by managing the affairs of the Centre, to participate intelligently in the affairs of local and central government, then education for democracy will have made a real advance.[157]

Cromwell was not the first to come up with the idea of the community center. But his memo was perhaps one of the earliest to connect its functions, and by relation the Social Welfare Department, to nation-building. At its most fundamental, nation-building refers to the efforts to foster a community with a sense of cohesion, by emphasizing commonalities, such as language, culture, loyalty to common ideals and goals, and usually within the set boundaries of a territory.[158] In the case of Singapore, as with most other colonies looking to

[156] NAS, SOAS PP MS 33. Cromwell to Parents, 10 July 1955.
[157] NAS, SWD 145/57. "Community Centres in Singapore".
[158] Nation-building in Singapore and Southeast Asia, or its history at least, has been understood and studied through more political lens, which is usually a focus on government structures and its policies. See for instance published monographs under the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak's *History of Nation-building* series (edited by Wang Gungwu), by Cheah Boon Kheng, Edwin Lee, and Taufik Abdullah, for the countries of Malaysia, Singapore,

decolonize after the Second World War, there were several impediments to a post-colonial nation-state, namely the presence of divergent loyalties and interests within the plural society, as well as the absence of expertise and experience in governing and administering a territory with a diverse society. Hence, the potential of community centers to train post-colonial leaders of society was attractive, not only for British government officials – who were well-aware of their expiry date – but also for budding leaders of a self-governing Singapore.[159] By the end of 1957, the Social Welfare Department built and managed at least eight community centers.[160] Other community centers were also built and managed by other state institutions, such as the Rural Board and the Singapore Improvement Trust.[161] In August 1958, oversight of all community centers was transferred to a new Community Recreation Division within the Ministry of Labour and Welfare. The division returned briefly to the Social Welfare Department in July 1959, but a year later in 1960, the management of all community centers in Singapore were permanently transferred to the newly-established People's Association.[162]

Twilight of the British Colonial Officer

Cromwell's presence in Singapore, a consequence of colonialism, became untenable as soon as the Labour Front formed a partially self-government in 1955, which was in contrast a consequence of decolonization. Fiercely anti-colonial, David Marshall as Chief Minister accelerated Malayanization, a process whereby locals would replace over four hundred expatriate officers in Singapore's civil service.[163] Cromwell saw the writing on the wall, "We have to accept the independence of Malaya and later Singapore; already we are

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and Indonesia respectively. Each of them focused almost exclusively on the nationalist and post-colonial leaders, their ideas and governments, of each country. See also essays in Wang Gungwu (ed.), *Nation-building: Five Southeast Asian Histories* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005).

[159] See Seah Chee Meow, *Community Centres in Singapore: Their Political Involvement* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1973). Seah quoted then Minister for Culture, S. Rajaratnam as saying: "When the Government introduced Community Centres its main aim was to use them as training grounds for democracy. Democracy does not mean only elected leader running the country or relying on the government to do everything…. Democracy means people also learning to do things for themselves; people willing to do service voluntarily for the community". (Quoted in Seah, p. 59). See also his speech at the Anniversary Celebrations of Kampong Glam and Kota Raja Community Centres on 6 June 1964. Available at NAS Speech and Press Releases, http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/PressR19640606a.pdf. Accessed 6 December 2015. Rajaratnam's references to democracy and civic participation is similar to the language used by Cromwell in the 1957 memo. The community centers in present-day Singapore comes under the direct purview of the Prime Minister's Office, via the People's Association.

[160] NUSCL, CO 1030/671-672.

[161] NAS, SWD 145/57. "Community Centres in Singapore", p. 2. The Rural Board and the Singapore Improvement Trust together had thirteen centers under their charge.

[162] SWDAR for 1959, p. 8, and SWDAR for 1960, p. 26.

[163] See chapter on "Towards a National Government" in Yeo, *Political Development in Singapore.*

much less "important" than we used to be".[164] Still, he spelled out the magnitude of the change:

> In any case I am only one of forty heads of departments in Singapore…. On 5 XII 56 the Malayanisation scheme will be put before the Legislative Assembly, providing for the replacement of European officers (now referred to contemptuously as "expats") as soon as possible.... And the reasons for wanting heads of departments to go is of course so that local boys can be the "bosses". Quite understandable.[165]

The "local boy" who replaced Cromwell in September 1957 was Dr. Goh Keng Swee. There is an interesting anecdote on how this change came about. The Colonial Secretary Office made the mistake of not consulting representatives from the Staff Side (an ad hoc group of local civil servants) before sending out a circular. The elected representative, Goh Teck Phuan, was then a Youth Service Officer in the Social Welfare Department and an active unionist. He had nursed a grudge against Cromwell for allegedly keeping him from the office (and preventing union activities in the office by sending him off to visit rural areas and islands). When the Colonial Secretary Office attempted to make amends, Goh asked that Cromwell be replaced by Goh Keng Swee in the spirit of Malayanization.[166] The anecdote might not be entirely accurate, as it comes from a memory several decades after the fact. But the underlying sentiments do vividly capture an aspect of decolonization that is not often highlighted in Singapore history, which was local resentment of British presence. In any case, and in another instance of a messy decolonization process, Goh Keng Swee assumed the position of Director of Social Welfare for only six months. In April 1958, Goh (and the entire Social Research Section) was seconded to the Chief Minister's Office in April 1958 to make

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[164] NAS, SOAS PP MS 33. Cromwell to Parents, 19 August 1956.

[165] NAS, SOAS PP MS 33. Cromwell to Parents, 28 November 1956. "I think most people will resign, collect their compensation and depart by April 1957, that is, Administrative Service people like me; professional engineers, doctors etc. will stay on longer, perhaps in individual instances as long as four years, but I don't think longer". In the interests of continuity, a substantial number of former colonial officers stayed on in Singapore or Malaya. One was Percival Herbert "Val" Meadows, Cromwell's deputy in the Social Welfare Department. He left in June 1956 and worked in various positions related to the City Council, the Rural Board and local government in general. In June 1959, he became Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of National Development. He was ostracized by the anti-colonial and populist, Ong Eng Guan (who alleged Meadows was a British intelligence officer). Lee Kuan Yew heard of his plight and plucked him out to work from the Prime Minister's Office. Meadows was involved in the reorganization of the City Council functions into new statutory boards, such as Public Utilities Board. (Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story*, pp. 335-337). For a brief biography, see Colin Cheong, *Can Do! The Spirit of Keppel FELS* (Singapore: Times Editions), p. 45, and *The Straits Times*, 21 December 1962, "Special duty' man Meadows to work in Brunei".

[166] NAS OHC, Goh Teck Phuan. Sports Personalities of Singapore. Accession Number 002128. Interviewed in 1999-2000. Reels 12 and 13 (of 42). Janet Yee also remembers Goh as fiercely anti-expatriate in her oral history, reel 3.

economic policy.[167] Soon after, he resigned altogether from government service to campaign in the 1959 general election on the People's Action Party ticket.

Cromwell remained in Singapore until he retired in 1960. His letters, in particular his observations of the political and social changes taking place in the late 1950s, make for fascinating reading as they reiterate the broader potential of social welfare for nation-building, albeit from his particular position. In the aftermath of relief operations to deal with considerable damage and dislocation caused by floods in December 1954, Cromwell reported: "The flood victims for their part have discovered that Government is not solely an organization with machinery for imposing and collecting taxes but can in time of need provide the wherewithal to alleviate distress and make rehabilitation possible in a very short space of time".[168]

Government could therefore be more than a staid, impersonal organization, and become an institution with a social conscience. The Social Welfare Department was perfectly placed to promote and reinforce such an image. The tangible aspects of social welfare, such as officers doling out financial relief, building community centers, and managing youth clubs, were coupled with the intangible bonds forged while conducting public assistance investigations, managing a home or a hostel, rescuing juvenile prostitutes and abused children, or even from the simple act of hearing someone out and providing counsel. Government was an organization, from Cromwell's standpoint, that provided the opportunities and the space where the divergent interests of the plural society could be harnessed for common purposes, and bring about a "common citizenship". Cromwell felt a strong government presence was necessary as "there is no real nationalism in Singapore…. People do not feel to be Singaporeans; at least relatively few". He commented that "it is just possible (justpossible) [sic] that racial antagonisms may be exacerbated after independence".[169] He observed

> … a natural lack of cooperation between the "alien" Chinese and the local Government, <u>because they do not feel they belong to it</u>. They cannot speak any of the recognized languages, and like the Englishman abroad they see no reason to learn them. They are fearful, easily led by their own kind and they

[167] NUSCL, CO 1030/673. Jan-Mar 1958 Quarterly Report.
[168] NUSCL, CO 1030/268. Progress Summary for December 1954.
[169] NAS, SOAS PP MS 33. Cromwell to Parents, 11 November 1956.

> have a remarkable sense for joining a majority in semi-passive movements antagonistic to "government". It is due largely to ignorance of the way Government works and what it does.[170]

Cromwell's efforts at rudimentary nation-building, that is to redirect the diverse loyalties into a shared sense of belonging, were overtaken by the constitutional developments, which were initiated ironically enough by decolonization. His ideas however, particularly the use of community centers, were not discarded, and indeed remained in practice long after he left.[171]

Similarly, the Social Welfare Department remained a part of the administrative bureaucracy of post-colonial governments, its structures and functions inherited almost in their entirety. The Department no longer exists, and the terms "social welfare" and "welfare" have faded from public view and taken on different meanings. But the successors of social welfare officers, almoners and volunteers, all of whom played a part in shaping a social welfare state in postwar Singapore, continue to serve those in need in contemporary Singapore. The social welfare policy introduced and implemented in late colonial Singapore was a success, insofar that it created and sustained a social welfare state of government departments, social services, and voluntary organizations dedicated to the well-being of society.

The British did introduce the policy of development and welfare, and their officers, like McNeice and Cromwell, took the lead in implementing the policy in late colonial Singapore. But the structural coherency and continuity of the social welfare state could be traced to the single-mindedness of social welfare officers, almoners, and volunteers executing their duties and taking responsibility – even in the middle of destabilizing change and tensions. Several of them had front-row seats to some of the defining moments in Singapore's postwar history, events that have been woven into the national history trope highlighted in Chapter 1. Thirteen-year old Nadra binte Ma'arof, also known as Maria Hertogh, stayed in York Hill under the charge of Tan Beng Neo for three months.[172] In the wake of the forcible

[170] My emphasis. NAS, SOAS PP MS 33. Cromwell to Parents, 28 October 1956. Cromwell also noted an unspoken "unholy alliance" between the "secret plotting planning communists and crypto-communists, between the vaguely idealistic sentimental young revolutionaries, the racially conscious older Chinese, and the secret society men and the out and out hooligans".

[171] In addition to Seah, *Community Centres in Singapore*, see Wong Saik Chin and Peter S. J. Chen, *The Impact of Community Centres on Social Development in Singapore* (Singapore: Dept. of Sociology, 1977), G. C. P. Riches, *Urban Community Centres and Community Development: Hong Kong and Singapore* (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1973), and Jimmy Yap, *We Are One: The People's Association Journey, 1960-2010* (Singapore: People's Association, 2010).

[172] On 11 December 1950, riots broke out in Singapore following a week of sensationalized media coverage of a Muslim girl living in a Catholic convent. Anger had been simmering ever since the High Court had ruled Maria Hertogh's Islamic marriage illegal and transferred custody from her foster mother to her natural Dutch-Eurasian

removal of students from two Chinese middle schools in October 1956, social welfare officers had to barricade themselves in their offices against an angry mob. The latter had been provoked by Cromwell charging through the mob (to escape) after rescuing the Union Jack from the nearby children's social center.[173] The split within the People's Action Party in July 1961 directly affected Toh Mah Keong's work of building community centers.[174] The Social Welfare Department was also at the forefront of relief operations in response to the massive Bukit Ho Swee fire earlier that year.[175]

In some of the oral histories, interviewees did not seem as eager as their interviewers to interpret their actions within the context of the Singapore Story trope. Janet Yee made it clear at several points in her interview that she was less interested in the politics than in her work for the Social Welfare Department and advocating in general for social justice. When asked how the strike by People's Association employees affected him, Mah Keong commented that he did not respond to verbal abuse, and was for the most part left alone. Picketers did damage some community centers, which led to Mah Keong erecting fencing

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parents. Rioters targeted Europeans and Eurasians in the ensuing violence, which lasted for three days and left eighteen people dead and over a hundred injured. Along with the 1964 race riots, the incident is used as a warning of the consequences of insensitivity to religion and race, and was also referenced in the White Paper on the Maintenance of Religious Harmony published in 1989. Beng Neo's recollections of Maria Hertogh's stay in York Hill are recorded in reels 20 and 21 of her oral history.

[173] The Chinese Middle School unrest was the violent climax of the Labour Front government's crackdown on alleged Communist groups, and the resulting standoff with students occupying various Chinese middle schools in protest. After police forcibly cleared the schools on 26 October 1956, students (by then joined by trade unions, rural associations, and affiliated groups) attempted to present a petition to the Hokkien Huay Kuan in the city. But their attempts were obstructed by roadblocks. The ensuing violence lasted four days and resulted in thirteen deaths. This incident was the third major unrest in Singapore as in many years, following the 1954 protest against National Service registration and the 1955 Hock Lee Bus Company strike and riots. Cromwell's almost contemporaneous recollections of the incident are detailed in a letter to his parents dated 28 October 1956, two days after the flag incident.

[174] On 26 September 1961, over a hundred People's Association employees downed tools in protest of the dismissal of seventeen former community center organizers the month before. The latter group were collateral damage in the split in the ranks of the People's Action Party in July 1961. Following sharp reversals in two by-elections, then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew convened a Legislative Assembly ostensibly asking for a vote of confidence in his government, but also to out Communist and pro-Communist elements within the People's Action Party that had worked against it. Thirteen Assemblymen who abstained from voting, and others including Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan, were expelled from the PAP. They formed the Barisan Sosialis (Socialist Front) in September 1961. The strike lost steam by the end of the year, though as late as March 1962, the premises of the Kallang headquarters and the Havelock Road community center were still being picketed. Happening so quickly after the split and the formation of the Barisan Sosialis, the strike was perceived as the "first round of a tussle of power" between the PAP and the Barisan (*The Straits Times*, 20 March 1962, "People's Assn. shake-up" – quote taken from an assembly debate in December 1961).

[175] On 25 May 1961, a massive fire in the squatter settlement in Bukit Ho Swee razed to the ground over 2,000 buildings and structures, leaving four dead and more than 16,000 people homeless. The fire has always been taken as the turning point in Singapore's housing history, as the Housing and Development Board accelerated its building projects after the event. Thirty-five-year-old Goh Sin Tub was then Deputy Director of Social Welfare. For his recollections on coordinating relief efforts, hear OHC interviews Reels 5 and 6 (Accession Number 001422). For a history of the fire, see Loh Kah Seng's *Squatters into Citizens.*

around the premises. But even then, he was mindful of the broader purpose of the community centers as public spaces for the surrounding community. He informed the interviewer that at no time was anyone denied entry into the centers, even if they were known to be strikers as they were also "member[s] of the community".[176] As the Maria Hertogh riots raged around her, Beng Neo had more pressing issues to worry about than to find out "exactly what happened at the Good Shepard":

> Because the girl was out of my hand[s]. I had other jobs to do, you see. The home had to be run. But when things got very ... dangerous you know, when there was a curfew and people were being killed and all that, I had to keep an eye on my children, keep an eye on the food because there was no food coming in. In fact, I got a curfew pass to go out and collect bread. You see, when you have over a hundred in a home, the food situation is very critical when nothing comes in. Well, I went and collected my bread. And we were able to feed the children with whatever we had....[177]

Beng Neo's single-mindedness, and that of dozens of her colleagues in the Social Welfare Department, not only ensured the job got done. It gave meaning to social welfare during a time when the idea was novel and slightly alien to Singapore's colonial experiences till then. In turn, this gave coherency to a nascent social welfare state.

[176] NAS OHC, Toh Mah Keong, reel 9. (This was of course a recollection, rather than a documentation, of his sentiments then).
[177] NAS OHC, Tan Beng Neo, reel 21.

CHAPTER 7. SECURING THE WELFARE OF A SINGAPORE NATION

The functions and services established by the social welfare state were seen by many as the first step to a broader, more comprehensive welfare system. The emergence of the British welfare state after 1948, driven by the hopes for a just and better postwar society brought about by the Beveridge Report and a Labour government, did not go unnoticed in the colonies. Singapore came very close to implementing the classic welfare state, that is a social security system based on social insurance. If it had been fully realized, Singapore after 1965 could have had a social security that, in theory at least, brought individuals together into a community, which in turn could potentially support an embryonic Singaporean identity. This chapter discusses Singapore's abortive attempts to introduce social insurance as a culminating point of this current study. The history presented below encapsulates the main themes of this study, which are the ambiguities of colonial policy during decolonization, the shifting positions of colonizer and colonized, and the local histories arising from those tensions. Furthermore, the welfare state was in itself the culmination of responses to social contingencies on the larger levels of states and nations. It provided an attractive template to build a post-colonial future for decolonizing societies. In the quest for the ideal relationship between state and society, Singapore's search for social security is also part of broader histories of state formation and nation-building.

Singapore, almost a "Welfare State"

The work of the Social Welfare Department, and that of its affiliates in government and society, was limited to the individual, or at most, to the family or household. They concentrated on particular social needs that usually emerge near or past the point of destitution, and moreover on individuals identified to be vulnerable, such as the elderly, the sick, women, and children. The Social Welfare Department was there to assist, primarily via the Public Assistance scheme, at moments when loss of income occurred. In the late colonial period, those moments included old age, permanently and temporarily unemployed, and death of the breadwinner. In addition, sickness allowances were also distributed, while living allowances were given to the head of the household and his or her dependents while

undergoing tuberculosis treatment.[1] But such assistance was conditional on application and fulfillment of requirements, investigation of need, and a means test of income.

The development of Singapore's social welfare state paralleled Britain's own welfare state. I use the term "welfare state" in its classic understanding as a social security system.[2] It is a term that has come to be associated historically with the British Labour Government's unified social insurance and national assistance system and the National Health Service that were established between 1946 and 1948. Policymakers and scholars, whether for or against Beveridge's ideas, preferred the terms "social security" or "social insurance" instead – even Beveridge himself.[3] In this context, social security means protection from social contingencies resulting in the loss of income or social support. The main contingencies are usually death, maternity, raising children or supporting a family, old age or retirement, injury or sickness, and unemployment.

The welfare state that emerged after the Second World War was the result of a gradual process that began in the nineteenth century. It was informed by a variety of factors and circumstances that included the social and political responses to industrial capitalism since the late nineteenth century, persistent economic slumps, and war. The years immediately following the Second World War were the high point of open discussions concerning "cradle to grave" coverage of the lives of citizens. The period between the late 1940s and 1970s has been widely perceived as the "Golden Age" of the welfare state.[4] At the

[1] Sickness allowances were introduced in 1951, and discontinued in the late 1950s. Living allowances for tuberculosis treatment were paid out from April 1949. (*The Straits Times*, 29 April 1949, "Allowances for T.B. Victims Being Paid"). It is not immediately clear when allowances were discontinued, but the record shows that allowances were still being paid well into the 1980s.

[2] The earliest use of the term in a colonial context concerned Burma. During a parliamentary debate in 1947 on the Burma Independence Bill, "the Secretary of State for Burma noted that the new Burmese Constitution was a statesmanlike document proclaiming a varied list of individual rights, in complete accordance with the modern view of a 'welfare state'". This usage was in an international relations context, to contrast with a Power State, rather than in the context of social security. Petersen and Petersen, "Confusion and divergence", p. 47.

[3] William Beveridge never used the term in *Social Insurance and Allied Services*. Beveridge disliked the term as it gave the impression of a "Santa Claus" state, which was contrarian to the contributory and participatory principles of his social security plan. See Wincott, "Original and imitated or elusive and limited?", p. 130. Quoted José Harris, *William Beveridge: A Biography* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 459-464. "Will, in a great state of distress, … said that his original ideas had been mutilated, reversed, and taken completely out of his hands although given his name; that he had come to loathe both the caption 'Welfare State' and the title 'Beveridge Plan' which had become like advertising slogans, which taken together had led many people hopelessly to misunderstand what he had truly worked for, and in what must have been an extreme expression of his desolation … added that he wished he had never started any Beveridge ideas". (p. 477).

[4] The welfare state's "golden age" is generally understood to be between 1945 and the late 1970s. In Britain, the turn against the welfare state is usually attributed to the ascension of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979, though resistance to welfare state legislation existed even in the late 1940s. See Fraser, *British Welfare State*, pp. 245-264 (resistance against the National Health Service), and pp. 280-288 (Margaret Thatcher rolling back the welfare state). See also Christopher Pierson, *Beyond the Welfare State? The New Political Economy of Welfare* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, c2007. Third edition; first published in

same time, there were serious discussions in London and elsewhere concerning the introduction of social security in the British Empire and in the rest of the world.[5]

It is possible to review briefly some of these ideas via the personalities encountered in this study. After the Second World War, Augustin Gomez and Valentine Frois could not work due to old age and illness. They eventually became dependent on the goodwill of family and friends, and financial assistance from the Social Welfare Department. In the ideal situation of a functioning social security system, both men would not have had to apply for financial assistance from the Social Welfare Department. Assuming they had made regular contributions from their wages and/or from employer contributions, both men would have been automatically assured of some income during social contingencies. Moreover, going by Gomez' experiences, an aspect of the British welfare state did exist in postwar Singapore, such as free or close-to-free healthcare. He did not recall having to pay for medical treatment or hospitalization after his enforced stay in the General Hospital. A system would also be in place to assess income levels, and to impose taxes and mandatory contributions from wages accordingly. Revenue from taxes would then fund social assistance or direct financial aid schemes. Mandatory contributions extracted from employer and employee alike would go into a common insurance pool, which would provide, when conditions are met, monetary benefits for needs during times of sickness, injury, unemployment, or death of breadwinner.

Decolonization meant that the social security of thousands of workers in Singapore could not be ignored. Preparation for self-government involved the canvassing of support by both policymakers and aspiring nationalists alike among the general population, a substantial portion of whom were organized into trade unions. There were sufficient reasons for all sides (government and society) to consider seriously and plan for the social security of workers and their families in Singapore. That advanced plans to introduce social security, an actual welfare state in its classic meaning, fell through was due not so much to ideological aversions against welfarism or opposing political philosophies.[6] Rather, the complications of

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1991), p. 105, and volume 2 of Nicholas Deakin, Catherine Jones-Finer and Bob Matthews (eds.), *Welfare and the State: Critical Concepts in Political Science* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004). See for a critique of "epochalism", Daniel Wincott, "The (Golden) Age of the Welfare State: Interrogating a Conventional Wisdom", *Public Administration*, vol. 91/no. 4, (2013), pp. 806-822.

[5] During an international social insurance conference held in Geneva in 1947, several European countries announced plans to introduce new or to expand existing social security measures. Reported in *The Singapore Free Press*, 24 October 1947, "The Way Other Folk Live". See also Chapter 1 of Victor George, *Social Security: Beveridge and After* (London, Routledge & K. Paul; New York, Humanities P., 1968), for an overview of global interest in social insurance and social policy matters after the Second World War.

[6] As suggested by Michael Barr in "Lee Kuan Yew's Fabian Phase", *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, Vol. 46 / No. 1 (2000), pp. 110–126.

decolonization, changes in government, and political instability were more decisive in undermining such plans.

Early Discussions

The earliest reported mention of "social security" in postwar Singapore was by the newly-formed Malayan Democratic Union in December 1945. Formed by a mixed group of idealists, proto-nationalists, and communists, social security was part of a broad package that would eventually lead to "democratic self-government".[7] In 1947, the People's Constitution Proposals were published by PUTERA-AMCJA coalition, as an alternative to the White Paper drawn up by the British to replace the ill-fated Malayan Union.[8] Included within the proposals was a call for a social security scheme, mirroring to a large extent Beveridge's schema of addressing the five giants of squalor, idleness, want, ignorance and disease. The concrete measures included a minimum wage, the recognition of rights for all Malayan citizens to income maintenance in old age, in times of sickness or loss of capacity to work, the right to education, and the right to leisure.[9]

As news reached Singapore and Malaya in July 1948 of each step Britain had taken toward the welfare state, local discussions for social security apparently also increased.[10] In accordance with the postwar colonial policy then, there was an in-principle acceptance that social security was the government's responsibility. Representatives of the colonial administration from the Social Welfare and Labour Departments admitted as much in a

[7] *The Straits Times*, 19 December 1945, "A Democratic Union: Autonomy Goal Visualised". The MDU sought "the introduction of educational reforms, social security, embracing free medical attention, a higher standard of living, and the abolition of colour distinction". See also Philip Hoalim, *Malayan Democratic Union: Singapore's First Democratic Political Party* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1972).

[8] PUTERA stood for Pusat Tenaga Ra'ayat (roughly Center for People's Power). It was a coalition of Malay political parties opposed generally to the UMNO exclusivity in negotiations with the British to discuss alternatives to the Malayan Union. AMJCA stood for the All Malaya Council of Joint Action, a coalition of similar organizations, predominantly non-Malay. See Mustapha Hussain, *Malay Nationalism Before UMNO: The Memoirs of Mustapha Hussain* / translated by Insun Sony Mustapha; edited by Jomo K. S. (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications & Distributors, 2005).

[9] Pusat Tenaga Ra'ayat and the All Malaya Council of Joint Action, *The People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya 1947* (Selangor: Ban Ah Kam, 2005).

[10] See for instance *The Singapore Free Press*, 26 June 1947, "Clerks Will Fight for Justice"; *The Singapore Free Press*, 30 June 1947, "Those working in the Empire"; *The Straits Times*, 8 April 1948, "Social Security Proposal"; *The Singapore Free Press*, 14 April 1948, "Union Urges Labour Probe"; *The Straits Times*, 24 January 1949, "Asian Seamen's New Deal Ahead". *The Singapore Free Press*, 25 May 1948, "Clerks' Appeal to Employers", *The Straits Times*, 19 November 1948, "Social Security: "Federation Not Ready For It"". "Social security" went from two and seventeen mentions in 1945 and 1946 respectively, to fifty each in 1947 and 1948, ninety-two in 1949, before lessening in the 1950s. The British "welfare state" came into operation in July 1948. *The Singapore Free Press*, 7 July 1948, "Freedom from Want", and *The Straits Times*, 6 July 1948, "Social Security" Now Rules in Britain".

public talk organized by the Social Welfare Department's "Departmental Training School" in 1947.[11] The question was how to go about it.[12] The 1947 social survey conducted by the Social Welfare Department was ostensibly to gather data with a view to support a future social security scheme, though no firm timetable was set. Behind the scenes, plans were afoot to at least begin preliminary exploration of how to introduce social security. The unpublished archival records make for mundane reading, but they do give insights first into how the colonial government went about a task it had little to no experience with, and second and more broadly, the tedious nature of policymaking.

In April 1948, the Governor of Singapore began the process by asking if the Social Welfare Department was prepared to work with the Labour Department to develop a social security scheme involving elements of social insurance.[13] Percy McNeice responded positively but also extremely cautiously. He suggested that government take the initiative by first experimenting with its own employees, and at the same time "stimulate [private] employers to start sickness and provident schemes for their own employees based on joint contributions from employers and workers".[14] The Social Welfare Department was "vitally interested" in the question of "Social Insurance proper, as an element in a system of Social Security", and since the year before, had been working on its own and with representatives from the International Labour Organization to collect the necessary information.

McNeice did not feel that Singapore was ready for social insurance. But to move forward, he recommended a survey be conducted and a statement made listing the existing elements that could potentially be part of a social security system: "health services, Workmen's Compensation, the Silver Jubilee and other funds, Public Assistance, maternity and other social assistance provisions". Data from the Social Welfare Department's Relief

[11] See Chapter 6. Reported as *The Singapore Free Press*, 26 November 1947, "Social security is Govt s duty", and *The Straits Times*, 23 November 1947, "Public Talks on Welfare".

[12] Interesting situation of demands being made publicly, but no concrete proposals. For instance, when a member of the Central Welfare Council (the Federation of Malaya's successor to the Malayan Welfare Council) made a request for a scheme to cover "widows, orphans and the blind", he had no answer to a question as to whether the scheme should be contributory or non-contributory. *The Straits Times*, 8 April 1948, "Social Security Proposal", and *The Singapore Free Press*, 8 April 1948, "Demand for social security scheme".

[13] NAS, SWD 215A/56B & C. Plan for Social Security. (A collection of three files with drafts and correspondence concerning social security dating back to 1947/8. It includes a manuscript letter by Goh Keng Swee detailing steps to investigate the feasibility of unemployment insurance in Singapore, draft lectures/speeches introducing the concept of social security to Singapore (which includes an overview of social security measures in other parts of the British Empire), correspondence between McNeice (first Secretary of the SWD) and the Governor on the SWD's role in planning social security, and draft papers on the status of Singapore's social welfare landscape to assist ILO experts invited to help establish a welfare state in Singapore during the late 1950s).

[14] NAS, SWD 215A/56B & C. File minutes. McNeice to Colonial Secretary, 15 April 1948.

Section and the 1947 social survey were to be used to estimate the size of the "problem in Singapore and to assess priority of need". He also felt it was "essential to know what the minimal [national] income is and is likely over a period (of time), given how social insurance was primarily a system of redistributing income (pooled from individual contributions)".[15] Information would also be gathered regarding "subsistence needs" and to calculate the "minimum income standards" in Singapore.

For the rest of the year, McNeice and his staff went about collecting information and opinions on starting up a social insurance scheme.[16] The general feeling, in government and in some sections of society, was that Singapore was not ready for the comprehensive social security scheme introduced in Britain, New Zealand, and elsewhere. The Social Welfare Department's Five-Year Plan, published in 1949 (but written in 1948), observed that the social security advancements made in Britain took more than a century to develop.[17] There was vast experience and practical knowledge in the administration of social security schemes, and a "highly organised scheme of taxation". The plan also noted that the British system was supported by a "homogeneous population with a high rate of literacy", which had been "accustomed to working cooperatively for a long time". These were attributes that were not immediately obvious in postwar Singapore

Other unflattering comparisons were made with the more advanced situation in Britain. A *Straits Times* editorial poured scorn on a government official's claim that the worker in Singapore was better off than the worker in Britain. The article cited in some detail how the social security benefits of the British worker and his family extended "from cradle to grave". While wages were admittedly competitive, the absence of an adequate system of social protection meant that workers in Singapore were vulnerable in all aspects of social policy – medical, housing, education, income maintenance, and civil society.[18] A Social

[15] NAS, SWD 215A/56B & C. File minutes. McNeice to Colonial Secretary, 15 April 1948. This was disputed by the Economic Adviser then, Frederic Benham. Benham felt a calculation of a national income was not a necessary precursor to a social insurance scheme as aggregate benefits would ideally be lesser. See minute date 11 May 1948.

[16] NAS, SWD 215A/56B & C. File minutes. McNeice to Colonial Secretary, 15 April 1948. These included correspondences with the Colonial Office on the progress in other colonies and territories in introducing social security. Of particular historical interest a handwritten letter by the late Goh Keng Swee on unemployment insurance and assistance. This was written in 1948 when he was studying in London. Another is an undated paper entitled "A Plan for Social Security in Singapore: A Preliminary Study of the Possibilities of Introducing Social Assistance and Insurance". Going by the contents, it is likely that it was completed sometime in late 1948 or 1949. It includes a visual diagram of existing social services, by government and society in Singapore.

[17] *Five-Year Plan*, p. 4.

[18] *The Straits Times*, 20 October 1948, "From Cradle to Grave". This was in response to *The Straits Times*, 14 October 1948, "Many Colony Labourers Better off than Britons". The leader also provoked an interesting

Security Working Party was apparently appointed in 1948. There is unfortunately scant information on its activities, save for mentions in the newspapers, and almost no mention at all in the archival record.[19] It does appear as if its work was hindered by the heavy workload of the Social Welfare Department during the early years (as discussed in Chapter 4). The absence of Goh Keng Swee and Monie Sundram from 1948 until they returned from their studies in London also did not help. Both had been involved in the 1947 social survey, while Sundram also supervised the emergency relief scheme.

Still, the Social Welfare Department was not idle. In 1951, the Department reorganized the Emergency Relief scheme it inherited from the British Military Administration. It was rebranded as Public Assistance, with clearer categories of the types of recipients and needs, such as the aged, widows and orphans, the permanently disabled, the temporary disabled, the unemployed, and for a time, those suffering from advanced tuberculosis.[20] From November 1951, sickness allowances were also granted to heads of households who were unable to work for more than a month due to illness, and their dependents. An attempt was made to put the scheme on a statutory basis, but this failed without much publicity.[21] A means test was enforced, which also included initially proof of residence of not less than twenty, ten, or three years for different categories. From 1953, however, residence requirements were reduced to only one year. As a result, expenditure on Public Assistance inclusive of allowances increased tremendously, from an annual expenditure $913,104 (for a monthly average of 4,162 cases) in 1952, to $2,423,503 (for 6,835 cases) in 1953, to $3,595,311 (for 9,943 cases). By 1959, the entire annual expenditure for direct financial assistance was close to $10 million for over 100,000 individuals.[22] Public Assistance was perceived as a vital cog in any potential social security system Singapore might have. The equivalent in Britain was National Assistance, specifically for those who could not be covered by National Insurance.

The Social Welfare Department did make another significant contribution to the advancement of social security via social research. Public mentions of the Social Security Working Party were either associated with Public Assistance, or the announcement of

response from a reader who had worked in Britain, and experienced certain aspects of social security. See *The Straits Times*, 23 October 1948, "From Cradle to Grave In Singapore".

[19] *The Straits Times*, 30 May 1949, "Security Plan Being Studied".

[20] SWDAR 1951, p. 34.

[21] *The Singapore Free Press*, 10 October 1951, "Statutory basis for social assistance".

[22] *The Straits Times*, 26 August 1959, "Under Review: Those 22,000 Public Aid Grants". The People's Action Party was only two months in government then. It began reviewing and identifying areas to reduce spending, saving about $800,000 for the remainder of the year.

surveys. The Social Research Section came to life again when Goh Keng Swee returned in 1951.[23] After a series of small surveys, Goh undertook an extensive study of the living conditions of urban households in 1953 and 1954. These households were deliberately selected as their members were predominantly in manual labor jobs or in the lower-paid white collar vocations. The maximum monthly income limit to be included in the survey was $400, the same limit to be eligible for Workmen's Compensation. The results were published in 1956 as *Urban Incomes & Housing: A Report on the Social Survey of Singapore, 1953-54*.[24] The survey's major contribution was a poverty line. More precisely, Goh calculated two scales of minimum needs, "one of which covers expenditure on food, clothing, household maintenance and personal expenses, the other taking into account children's education".[25] Goh's minimum standards were extremely harsh, "designed to allow a human being enough physiological strength for day-to-day functioning with little to no allowance for extraneous pursuits". This amounted to $101.85 per month (Malayan dollars at 1954 prices), and an additional $8.10 for educational expenses.

Two Wage-Earners in Late Colonial Singapore

Compare that amount to the night-soil carrier's average monthly wage during the same period of just over $120 (about $4.35 per day for twenty-six work days). Lim Hong Cher, originally from Fujian Province in China, worked as a night-soil carrier from March 1956 until the early 1980s when the night-soil bucket system was completely phased out in Singapore.[26] His salary then was just above the minimum standards set by the *Urban Incomes* survey. Hong Cher was supporting a family of at least four – he had married in 1950 and had

[23] See for instance *The Straits Times*, 15 December 1951, "Health survey to be taken in Colony"; *The Straits Times*, 10 April 1952, "Sick survey report is ready", *The Straits Times*, 13 March 1952, "Survey on sickness benefits in Singapore", *The Straits Times*, 8 July 1952, "In Singapore on Sickness", The *Straits Times*, 2 October 1952 "No Money -So No Sickness Survey", and *The Singapore Free Press*, 4 August 1953, "Too Busy To Study".

[24] Just as Silcock provided the moral anger for the 1947 survey, S. Rajaratnam's two-part review of Urban Incomes was similar in bringing out the human side of Goh's statistical approach. See The *Straits Times*, 14 February 1956, "Tenants who Rent Living Space the Size of a Coffin", and *The Straits Times*, 15 February 1956, "Workers are willing, but 25 per cent live near the poverty line"

[25] The survey is discussed in Ho Chi Tim, "Goh Keng Swee in a Social Welfare History of Singapore", in Emrys Chew and Kwa Chong Guan (eds.), *Goh Keng Swee: A Legacy of Public Service* (Singapore: World Scientific Pub. Co.: S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, c2012), pp. 51-54.

[26] Information taken from NAS OHC, Lim Hong Cher. Vanishing Trades, Accession Number 000745. Interviewed in 1986. 6 Reels. Lim was also featured in *The Straits Times*, 30 September 1986, "A job that's not to be sniffed at". Night-soil refers to human waste, usually collected at night. This vocation predated a modern sewage system, and was phased out in Singapore by the late 1980s. See also Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space*, pp. 193-204.

two children in 1952. Hence, he had to supplement his earnings ferrying passengers in a trishaw during the afternoons, after his morning rounds carrying night-soil. He recalled, "In the past, just having one job wasn't enough".[27]

Hong Cher accumulated sufficient work experience to know firsthand the challenges of eking out a living in late colonial Singapore. He arrived in Singapore after the Second World War in 1947, when he was sixteen years of age.[28] His first job in Singapore was to help build a sago factory located along Plantation Avenue in the northeast of the island, where he later worked full-time washing, cooking, drying, and packing sago from Indonesia into sacks (*dans*) for export. Hong Cher earned anywhere from $2.60 to $2.80 per day for an "inside" (indoors) job (washing, frying and drying), and $3.30 to $3.50 for an "outside" (outdoors) job (packing and transporting sacks of sago). He worked hard, each day completing three – instead of the usual two – sessions.[29] He recalled several times in his oral history having worked non-stop for the first 170 days before taking a day's rest. Hong Cher earned about $300 every month, a significant amount in the postwar period. His employer was the quintessential "good employer", who provided lodging and daily meals for all workers.[30]

Unfortunately for Hong Cher, the sago company's fortunes declined, and he was forced to look for new work in 1951. He worked as a coolie at Boat Quay, carrying bags of rice and cement from the *twakow* (bumboats) to the godowns (warehouses) along the Singapore River. Hong Cher earned two cents for every sack carried. The sacks were packed

[27] NAS OHC, Lim Hong Cher, reel 1. For a journalistic insight into working conditions, see S. Rajaratnam's series of four *The Straits Times* articles investigating reasons behind industrial unrest in 1955 Singapore: *The Straits Times*, 21 October 1955, "Trueulence is used to hold workers' loyalty"; *The Straits Times*, 24 October 1955, "Parasitic economy is an unreal basis for prosperity of Singapore"; *The Straits Times*, 25 October 1955, "Is the craftsman's high wage a threat to Singapore's economy?" and *The Straits Times*, 27 October 1955, "Economic healthy demands the workers' appreciation of the requirements of industry".

[28] NAS OHC, Lim Hong Cher, reel 1.

[29] NAS OHC, Lim Hong Cher, reel 5. "Yes, I worked three sessions, I had to work until at night. From dawn I had to work until at night, for ten over hours. I had to pack the sago, at times I had to work until after 3 o'clock. So that was two sessions, $200. As for packing the sago, one month I could earn several tens of dollars, $50 to $60. I worked three sessions, including the money I earned by packing the sago, I managed to earn more than $300".

[30] NAS OHC, Lim Hong Cher, reel 5. I use the term "good employer" as described by the Singapore Committee on Minimum Standards of Livelihood in its *Report of the Committee for Minimum Standards of Livelihood* (Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., 1957), p. 5. The committee noted that "In Singapore, the "good" employer has long been in the habit of providing his employees with medical care and sick leave, and of contributing, by means of an employment provident fund, to the accumulation of a capital sum for the benefit of the employee when the latter reaches the age of retirement. In recent years legislation has aimed at making the practices of "good" employers obligatory on all, for instance in the case of sick leave, and provision of a capital sum on retirement".

together into bigger sets called "*dans*", usually at ten or nine sacks per set.[31] Hong Cher could earn about seven to eight dollars a day. But the job depended on the arrival of the boats and their cargo. Hence, Hong Cher could work as long as ten hours a day, or sometimes as short as two hours. Coolie labor was irregular employment, depending very much on whether the headman (*kepala*) could find work on any given day.

> At that time, the place where I worked as a coolie was… they didn't go and tender for the job, so there was no job. If the *kepala* didn't have work for us to do, then we wouldn't have work to do…. [O]ur job was not always very smooth. Over here [referring to his night-soil carrying job] we had work to do every day. We used to go out in the morning and then returned early in the afternoon. Over there, sometimes we didn't have work to do in the morning. It was delayed until the afternoon and then we had work to do. We worked until at night at that time. Work was like this then.[32]

Hong Cher applied for a license to become a trishaw rider in 1952, as it was comparatively more "permanent and stable". He practiced, and passed the practical test on his first attempt. He then plied his trade in the eastern part of Singapore, as it was nearer his home along Chapel Road in Katong. Hong Cher earned between four to eight dollars a day, more if it was a rainy day (averaging between $100 and $200 per month).[33] He recalled he would "work harder" in the afternoons, so as to earn more to support his family

The need to increase his income led Hong Cher to register at the labor exchange. In March 1956, he began working in a night-soil factory at Paya Lebar and was involved in all aspects of night-soil collecting. He retrieved night-soil buckets from residences. The buckets were solid iron, each weighing about twenty to twenty-five katis (about twenty-seven pounds) when empty, and about a hundred katis (about a hundred and ten pounds) when full. After disposing of the buckets' contents, he washed them and the trucks transporting them back at the factory. Depending on the type, one truck had the capacity to carry about sixty to eighty buckets. In 1956, there were three night-soil factories in Singapore, located at Paya Lebar, Waterloo Street, and Park Road (South Bridge Road), in total employing more than six hundred workers. Hong Cher worked the full seven days of the week, including public holidays (but received a day's pay for each Sunday and public holiday worked). Each workday started at 6.30am in the morning, ending around 2pm in the afternoon. Hong Cher's

[31] A *dan* of ten sacks could weigh about 168 katis, while a *dan* of nine sacks about 182 katis. (1 kati is approximately 1 1/3 lbs.).
[32] NAS OHC, Lim Hong Cher, reel 1.
[33] NAS OHC, Lim Hong Cher, reel 2. He recalled it then cost a little more than ten cents for a kati of fish.

income from night-soil carrying was initially $4.35 per day, a figure that was increased by five cents after the first five years, and then by ten cents after ten years.[34] To earn more, he continued trishaw riding in the afternoons to supplement his income. Hong Cher benefited from various sources of social protection throughout his working life. In his interview, he did not mention falling sick too often nor did he appear to have suffered any serious injury that would have depleted his already meager earnings. If he fell sick, Hong Cher was entitled, as part of his job, to paid sick leave and his family also benefited from free or subsidized health care. He joined unions opened to trishaw riders and night-soil collectors. The former, Public Daily Rated Employees Union Federation, was particularly active in agitating for better working conditions during the 1950s.

The situation of an odd-job or irregularly employed worker was less secure. Take for instance Lee Fatt Lor, who plied a barber trade along the five-foot ways in Bugis Street during the 1960s.[35] Originally from China, he was a proprietor of a flourishing barber business in Hong Kong until the Japanese invaded. His wife was killed by a bomb during the attack, an incident which he said marked the beginning of his "economic downturn". Leaving his young son behind (in the care of a relative), he migrated to Malaya, working as a barber in various towns and cities, before arriving in Singapore sometime in the 1950s. By then, he was already fifty years old, and could not find regular work in a barber shop. Hence, he started his own five-foot way barber shop, which consisted of "a rattan chair, a box of hair cutting tools [clipping razors, scissors, ear digging tools etc.], a mirror and a small pail of water". He charged considerably less than established barber shops, about thirty cents for a child and sixty for an adult (compared to fifty cents and a dollar twenty respectively in shops). He earned about three dollars a day on average, which was apparently enough for his expenses, such as rent (six dollars a month for a bunk space in a shop house in nearby Queen Street) and three meals a day at nearby food stalls. Without any obvious means of support should he be unable to work, Lee made a conscious attempt to stay healthy. While he stayed in regular contact with his son, he had no intention of returning to China. He told the researcher that when he can no longer work because of old age, he expected to "depend on the Public Assistance provided by the Social Welfare Department".[36]

[34] NAS OHC, Lim Hong Cher, reel 2. In 1986, he said he was earning $19.95 per day, which came up to (with allowances) about $447. (Reel 4).
[35] Chan Siew Kong, "A Study of a Street – Bugis Street: A Street of No Night" (Unpublished academic exercise - Dept. of Social Studies, University of Singapore, 1965), pp. 199-204.
[36] Chan, "Bugis Street", p. 204.

The Complications of Decolonization

Throughout the 1950s, certain components of a social security system were in place in Singapore. In the Social Welfare Department, Singapore had a state agency dedicated to improving the general well-being of society, which, going by Fatt Lor's resigned comments, was well-established in the public consciousness. This included the Public Assistance scheme financed from public revenue and subjected to a means test. The poor and destitute could also access medical services. At the individual level, there were varying levels of social protection provided by employers or unions. Hong Cher for instance had job benefits, such as bonuses and allowances, subsidized medical care for him and his wife, and sick leave. The need for such as system was also present, as represented by individuals with little to no social support of their own, like Fatt Lor, Augustin Gomez or Valentine Frois. What remained was the political will to pull everything together, as Britain and New Zealand had done in 1948 and 1938 respectively, and the right mix of circumstances to see it through.

The political intent did exist, first (and more broadly) at the core of postwar colonial policy of development and welfare; and second, in local politicians and groups aspiring to replace the British. Political parties aspiring to replace the British also made social security part of their agenda for postcolonial Singapore. Conducive socio-political circumstances unfortunately did not exist, or did not stay stable long enough for a comprehensive social insurance scheme to emerge. From 1946 to 1965, the Singapore government changed hands twice (1955 and 1959), was subsumed into a larger federation (1963), and then suddenly became fully independent (1965). From the British perspective, their executive powers were being reduced at a rather quick pace. More than a century's worth of British rule seemed irrelevant as Singapore transited swiftly from having no elections before 1948, to a fully-elected legislature in 1959. Moreover, all of these events unfolded on the backdrop of regional neighbors achieving independence and a Communist insurgency that infiltrated significant sections of local society.

Political intent was manifested in Lim Yew Hock's representations to the colonial government in the late 1940s. Between 1948 and 1955, Lim was an Unofficial Member of the Singapore Legislative Council, ostensibly to represent the trade unions.[37] In 1948, he proposed that all commercial firms should be compelled by law to provide either a provident

[37] *The Singapore Free Press*, 25 March 1948, "Four Unofficials Nominated".

fund or a social insurance scheme for their employees, observing that "there must be some social security for workers who are the backbone of any democracy".[38] The following year in 1949, Lim went further, pushing a resolution through the Legislative Council to commit the government to investigate and to make recommendations for social security legislation.[39]

The resolution was not unopposed. The representatives from the various Chambers of Commerce proposed an amendment to Lim's resolution, essentially to remove any commitment on the part of government to legislate for social security.[40] The proposed amendment was defeated and Lim's motion was carried with the tacit support of Patrick McKerron, Colonial Secretary of the Singapore government.[41] McKerron also informed the council that the Social Welfare Department had been investigating the "question of developing social security services" since 1948 and invited Lim to join the Social Security Working Party already formed.[42] However, other than the activities of the Social Welfare Department, nothing else concrete materialized after the council meeting of 15 March 1949. Lim did not make any further public statements on social security, nor was there any news about the committee looking into social security. It is possible that social security matters were overtaken by more pressing concerns, such as political developments within Singapore, and the Malayan Emergency and the Cold War. In 1951, at the height of hustings for the second Legislative Council elections (and in response to Lim's campaigning), a disgruntled reader of *The Straits Times* asked what had happened to the resolution passed almost two years ago.[43] Lim was at that time busy running for a Legislative Council seat as the President of the Labour Party of Singapore, on a manifesto that included social security for workers.[44]

As noted earlier, there was undeniable British caution against the indiscriminate implementation of metropolitan-style social policy. There were however real obstacles to a welfare state. A point often lost in the euphoric reception of the Beveridge Report was that Beveridge's plan was not all that revolutionary. Instead, Beveridge's focus was on efficiency via the unification of the social security programs and social services already in place, "a

[38] *The Singapore Free Press*, 18 August 1948, "Social Security: Council Demand".
[39] *The Straits Times*, 14 March 1949. "S'pore Social Security Plan Sought". Lim had probably briefed the press, as news of the resolution reached the press a day before the 15 March sitting of the Legislative Council.
[40] *The Straits Times*, 16 March 1949, "Social Security Move In Colony". The representatives were Tan Chin Tuan (Chinese Chamber of Commerce), R. Jumabhoy (Indian Chamber of Commerce), and E. M. F. Fergusson (Singapore Chamber of Commerce).
[41] *The Straits Times*, 16 March 1949, "Social Security Move In Colony". See also Colony of Singapore, *Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, 15 March 1949 (Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., 1949).
[42] *The Straits Times*, 16 March 1949, "Social Security Move In Colony". See also *The Straits Times*, 17 March 1949, "The Beginning of Security".
[43] *The Straits Times*, 14 February 1951, "The Egg That Takes Too Long To Hatch".
[44] *The Straits Times*, 9 April 1951, "Singapore Will Go To The Polls Tomorrow".

stage ... reached after nearly 100 years of steady advance in the field of social progress".[45] Singapore lacked Britain's foundations that had been painstakingly built over a long period of time. Thus, there was precious little expertise and knowledge to operate social security programs and social services beyond the local level. For instance, the colonial government did consider a healthcare system for Singapore similar to the British National Health Service, but the proposal was never implemented because of insufficient doctors and hospital beds.[46] There was also apprehension, voiced by the Commissioner of Labour in 1948, as to whether workers in Singapore would accept the contributory principle of social insurance, when they were already receiving similar benefits from their employers.[47]

However, confronted with a strident and at-times violent anti-colonialism, colonial authorities and local political parties could ill-afford to ignore an organized working class. At the behest of Lim Yew Hock, the government approved in 1949 treatment allowances for workers (and their families) recovering from tuberculosis.[48] As seen earlier, eligibility requirements to receive Public Assistance was also relaxed from 1953. In the same year, the Progressive Party tabled the Central Provident Fund bill for approval, starting a long four-year process to the Fund's eventual introduction in 1955.[49] The Progressive Party was formed in 1947 by the English-speaking elite in Singapore society, including the lawyers Tan Cheng Chye (or C. C. Tan as he was more commonly known) and John Laycock (who had raised public awareness of poverty and destitution in prewar Singapore). Their version of social security was a provident fund, to which employer and employee made monthly contributions for a sum of money provided on retirement.[50]

Almost at the same time, the colonial government appointed a commission to study "desirability and practicability" of retirement benefits.[51] The commission was plagued by difficulties from the start. There was little to no publicity about its work and purpose.[52] There was moreover no trade union representation on the Commission.[53] Thus, despite repeated

[45] *Five-Year Plan*, p. 4.
[46] International Labour Office, *Report to the Government of Singapore on social security measures* (Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., 1957), pp. 72-75.
[47] *The Straits Times*, 14 October 1948. "Many Colony Labourers Better Off Than Britons".
[48] SWDAR 1950, pp. 30-32.
[49] *The Singapore Free Press*, 16 January 1951, "Provident Fund For All Workers: Progressives Draft New Law", and *The Straits Times*, 17 January 1951, "Provident Fund For All Workers Proposed".
[50] First announced in *The Singapore Free Press*, 12 May 1949, "Security Plan for Clerks".
[51] The Commission was appointed in May 1951. It was chaired by F. S. McFadzean, the regional representative for the Colonial Development Corporation, and completed its work in December of the same year. The findings were published as the *Report of the Retirement Benefits Commission* (Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., 1952).
[52] *The Straits Times*, 30 May 1951, "Trade Unions in 'the dark".
[53] *The Straits Times*, 20 July 1951, "Union Leaders Answer Critic".

solicitations, the majority of the trade unions did not respond positively to the Commission's request for their views, forcing one postponement of scheduled hearings.[54] The Commission considered two options, a provident fund and a pension scheme, and the majority found in favor of the latter option, noting that the middle-aged worker fully benefits from a pension scheme and that the provident fund may not be adequate for retirement needs in the long-term.[55]

There was one dissenting voice who preferred not to make any recommendations as he disagreed with the base assumption of a pension scheme, which was addressing the care and needs of the old-aged in Singapore via "ties of kinship and friendship", as being too haphazard to be effective.[56] The Commission's report, released in 1952, did not stop the Progressive Party's push for the provident fund. Its efforts were further emboldened by trade union support, as well as public disdain for the recommended pension amount.[57] The Central Provident Fund bill was finally passed in November 1953.[58] Administrative preparations began in 1954, and the provident fund started collecting monthly contributions from July 1955.[59] 1955 was also the year Singapore received partial self-governance under the conditions stipulated by the Rendel Constitution. The new government, a coalition between David Marshall's Labour Front Party and the UMNO-MCA Alliance, also included Lim Yew Hock, who became Minister for Labour and Welfare. After taking office, the government commissioned two interrelated studies that nudged Singapore closer to becoming a welfare state. The first was a study on the feasibility of the state ensuring minimum standards of livelihood, a term that included a minimum wage, unemployment insurance and other social

[54] *The Straits Times*, 19 June 1951, "Commission – Nothing To Hear".
[55] *Retirement Benefits Commission*, p. 15.
[56] *Retirement Benefits Commission*, p. 16.
[57] *The Straits Times*, 17 March 1952. "Unions Prefer Provident Fund"; *The Straits Times*, 29 February 1952. "$30 A Month Pension Ridiculous, They Say: Commission Has Many Critics". Not all members of the public agreed with parting with portions of their salary to the provident fund. A reader of *The Straits Times* called the CPF bill a "step towards a totalitarian state". See *The Straits Times*, 21 May 1951. "A Woman Says No".
[58] *The Straits Times*, 25 November 1953, "Now The Workers Need Not Fear The Day They Have To Retire". The logo for the CPF has not changed since the Fund's inception in 1955, i.e. three keys to represent the tripartite relationship between employers, employees, and the government. This is a principle continued by post-colonial PAP governments. Information on the logo can be found at "CPF Logo", https://www.cpf.gov.sg/Members/AboutUs/about-us-info/cpf-logo. Accessed 22 November 2016.
[59] For an introductory overview of the Central Provident Fund, see Lim Tin Seng, "Central Provident Fund (CPF)", *Singapore Infopedia: An electronic encyclopedia on Singapore's history, culture, people and events*. Accessed 2 November 2012. http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_573_2005-01-05.html. See also Linda Low & Aw Tar Choon, *Social insecurity in the New Millennium: The Central Provident Fund in Singapore* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2004), and Linda Low & T. C. Aw, *Housing a Healthy, Educated and Wealthy Nation Through the CPF* (Singapore: Times Academic Press for the Institute of Policy Studies, 1997).

security measures.[60] The second was an extensive survey of existing social welfare and social security measures in Singapore.[61] Both studies were to make proposals to improve or to establish social protection of the people of Singapore.

The Minimum Standards of Livelihood committee was chaired by Sir Sydney Caine, a seasoned colonial official and the government's Economic Advisor. The committee started work in November 1955 and submitted its findings in September 1956.[62] A broad range of views was solicited from both employers and employees, leading the committee to conclude that there were inherent difficulties as well as detrimental effects in ensuring a minimum wage at that time.[63] The committee recommended a comprehensive social security scheme, beginning with coverage for old age, death and sickness, with a view to covering unemployment later. The scheme was to be financed from employer and employee contributions.[64] To administer the scheme, the committee suggested the reorganization of the Department of Social Welfare into three divisions for Insurance (which would be based on the existing administrative structure of the Central Provident Fund), Public Assistance, and Welfare.[65] The committee also agreed with the Retirement Benefits Commission that a provident fund "cannot answer fully the need for provision of the aged". It therefore recommended that the Central Provident Fund should cease operations upon introduction of the social security scheme.[66]

The second study took place simultaneously and was also intimately connected to the government's concerns with labor unrest and the consequences of rising unemployment. From the time they took office, the Labour Front government, in particular Lim Yew Hock as the Minister for Labour and Welfare, announced several times that it had approached the International Labour Organization (ILO) to provide expert guidance.[67] The ILO sent G. J. Brocklehurst, an official from the New Zealand Social Security Department, who arrived in

[60] *The Straits Times*, 22 November 1955, "Sir Sydney Will Explore Welfare State: Basic Wage, Dole For All", The committee also included S. Rajaratnam, and Lim Chong Yah, then a young economist assisting Caine.
[61] *The Straits Times*, 4 October 1955, "Minimum Wage On The Way: ILO Man To Study Ways To Link Basic Pay With National Income", and *The Straits Times*, 25 October 1955, "Dole and Health Service Planned For Workers".
[62] The final report was published in 1957 as *Report of the Committee on Minimum Standards of Livelihood* (Singapore: Govt. Print. Off., 1957).
[63] *Minimum Standards of Livelihood*, pp. 32-33.
[64] *Minimum Standards of Livelihood*, pp. 40-41.
[65] *Minimum Standards of Livelihood*, pp. 57-59.
[66] *Minimum Standards of Livelihood*, pp. 43-44.
[67] See for instance *The Straits Times*, 6 June 1955, "Jobs Problem: Govt. Calls In An Expert", and The Straits Times, 31 August 1955, "Govt. Ask ILO Aid On Labour Troubles".

October 1955 and submitted his findings in September 1956.[68] Brocklehurst's final recommendations were similar to those from the Caine Report: a contributory social insurance scheme, covering first "temporary incapacity for work" (due to sickness or maternity), and after one year, old age, invalidity and death of breadwinner. More studies were needed before deciding on unemployment benefits. Agreeing with the Caine Report, Brocklehurst also recommended that all provident fund contributions should cease after a year of the social insurance scheme. To administer the scheme, he recommended the expansion of the Social Welfare Department into a new Social Security Department, placed under the purview of the Ministry of Labour and Welfare.[69]

The Colonizer Sidelined

Singapore's quest for social security might have been supported by colonial policy and the work of colonial officials, such as McNeice in the Social Welfare Department. But just as Cromwell became increasingly redundant, the Colonial Office from 1955 was similarly reduced to almost an observer role. In 1957, Sheila Ann Ogilvie, an Assistant Labour Adviser to the Social Service Department of the Colonial Office, wrote to the Harold S. Robinson, then General Manager of Singapore's Central Provident Fund. She sought detailed information on the scheme, which had by then been operational for two years. She also observed that the Colonial Office was "frequently under some pressure to advise on the introduction of some rudimentary form of social security in territories which do not seem ready for a full scheme on United Kingdom lines".[70]

Robinson's reply was comprehensive, and in some places moreover highlighted his own frustrations with developments in Singapore. Robinson noted that despite recommendations for a pension scheme by the Caine and Brocklehurst reports, there was "very little popular desire" for such a scheme. Leveraging his position as General Manager and drawing on the experiences of his staff, he stated: "Nearly every ordinary person who is consulted would prefer a lump sum in his old age to a periodical dole".[71] That realization was in stark contrast to his initial attitude when he first arrived in Singapore sometime in 1953.

[68] Published as the *Report to the Government of Singapore on Social Security Measures* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1957).
[69] *Social Security Measures*, pp. 79-80.
[70] NAS, CO 1030/897: Social Insurance. Ogilvie to Robinson, 21 March 1957.
[71] NAS, CO 1030/897. Robinson to Ogilvie, 3 May 1957.

Robinson had come to Singapore "with the idea that there were considerable advantages socially in paying pensions with the certainty of periodical small sums rather than lump sums which might soon be dissipated by incompetent individuals...."[72] But after four years, he came "more and more to the conclusion that in Eastern countries this is unpopular and ... probably unwise".

> The type of "do-gooding" by legislation which we favour in the West seems in many ways inappropriate to the tradition and outlook of countries of this kind. In general the Asian and particularly the Chinese spends his life endeavouring to secure a sufficient lump sum either to provide himself with accommodation or a small business or both, and he is usually able to secure from his relatives enough in the way of the dole to keep body and soul together. He is not interested in putting aside in his lifetime money to provide for the speculative provision of a pension for the indeterminate period of life which remains to him after he has ceased employment.[73]

While the vast majority of Singapore workers preferred to receive a lump sum upon retirement, there was on the other hand considerable pressure by labor unions for cash benefits for sickness and unemployment. In 1956, the Singapore Trades Union Congress made a representation to the Minimum Living Standards committee. It called for a minimum wage (based on the 1953/4 Urban Incomes and Housing survey), adjustments to the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance, and schemes for universal health benefits, unemployment, and old age pensions - all of which to be financed by the government, and hence public taxation.[74]

In his own submission to the Minimum Living Standards committee, Robinson suggested adjusting the provident fund structure to provide "day-to-day benefits" for sickness or unemployment. The principle of the lump-sum approach would remain for retirement, while existing and new contributors to the Central Provident Fund would be given the option of joining a new scheme that protects them during periods of sickness and unemployment. The principles of the proposed "day-to-day benefits" scheme was similar to the provident fund. The only difference was that previously non-contributory employees would now have to match the funds contributed by their employers.[75] After a qualifying period of one year, should the employee fall sick or become unemployed, half of his or her provident fund

[72] Ann Wee also recalls Robinson or his colleagues discussing attempting to get people in Singapore used to the idea of regular contributions. Personal communication to author.
[73] NAS, CO 1030/897. Robinson to Ogilvie, 3 May 1957.
[74] NAS, CO 1030/897. President STUC (S. Jaganathan) to Secretary Minimum Standards committee, 22 March 1956.
[75] NAS, CO 1030/897. Robinson to Wilson, Secretary for Minimum Standards Committee, 27 June 1956.

accumulated savings would be made available for such contingencies. Government could also step in, matching the amount available for the day-to-day benefits. At all times, half of the fund's accumulated savings would remain untouched so as to accumulate interest for retirement.

Robinson's proposal was introduced at a time of sustained discussion on social security in Singapore. As the Central Provident Fund was anticipated to be adopted for the new social security scheme, his proposal was also meant to serve as a transition from the lump-sum approach. Both the Minimum Living Standards committee and Brocklehurst's survey of social security measures had recommended a form of social insurance for Singapore. Robinson's proposal did capture succinctly the principles of individual, community, and state responsibility in matters of social policy. However, his opinion, as informed as it might have been, was irrelevant as a member of a group that was departing.

The Stillborn Welfare State

Both the Caine and Brocklehurst reports were published in 1957. In January 1958, Lim Yew Hock (who had replaced David Marshall as Chief Minister in June 1956) appointed a committee of officials to examine both reports and to recommend to the government a course of action.[76] The committee agreed with most of the recommendations of both reports, which called for establishment of a contributory social insurance scheme, starting with benefits for old age, sickness, maternity, and death of breadwinner. Unemployment insurance would begin only after a successful implementation of the scheme. Contributions to the Central Provident Fund would cease upon commencement of the social insurance scheme, with options for fund members to transfer their balances to the new insurance fund. A new Department of Social Security would be created by incorporating the administrative structure of the Central Provident Fund and the Public Assistance Section of the Department of Social Welfare.

Further assistance from the International Labour Organization was also requested to draft legislation for the new social security scheme as well as administrative guidance for the

[76] The committee consisted of the Permanent Secretaries to the Ministries of Finance, Labour and Health, the General Manager of the CPF Board, and the Director of the Social Welfare Department. The committee completed its work in September 1958. The report was published in 1959 as the *Interim report of the Committee of Officials established to examine the recommendations of the Brocklehurst and Caine Committee reports* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1959).

establishment of the social security department. It duly arrived in December 1958, in the person of F. B. Matthews, an official from the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance of the United Kingdom.[77] Over the course of the following six months, Matthews submitted four drafts of a social security bill to the Labour Front government.[78] They were eventually published as the *Report to the Government of Singapore on a Proposed Social Security Scheme*. The highlight of the report was draft legislation to introduce a comprehensive social insurance scheme in Singapore. It also included administrative guidance to establish a new social security department to administer the scheme aimed at insuring workers and their families against social contingencies such as sickness, maternity, death (of the breadwinner), old age, and unemployment.

At that point, circumstances again went against the social security scheme. Lim Yew Hock's Labour Front Party lost the 1959 general election to form Singapore's first self-government. That honor went to the People's Action Party, led by Lee Kuan Yew and included the former Director of Social Welfare, Goh Keng Swee. The People's Action Party did not immediately abandon ten years' worth of work after taking office, nor was it ignorant of the connection between economic development, industrial stability and social security for workers. Toh Chin Chye had earlier welcomed the Brocklehurst Report in 1957 in his capacity as Party Chairman and noted that its recommendations were an improvement on the Central Provident Fund.[79] As Acting Director of Social Welfare, Goh Keng Swee had even argued against the Caine and Brocklehurst reports' recommendation to delay implementation of unemployment insurance.[80]

As Minister for Finance, Goh also held talks between December 1960 and January 1961 with the Singapore Trades Union Congress (STUC) to establish industrial peace. During those meetings, the union representatives agreed in principle with the government's intention to institute unemployment insurance.[81] Unfortunately, progress stalled as union representatives opposed employee contributions to finance the unemployment insurance scheme. Social security issues moreover became less significant in the turbulent political situation after 1959. 1961 was a bad year for the People's Action Party as it endured one

[77] *The Straits Times*, 8 January 1959, "Welfare State: Expert Aid From Britain".
[78] International Labour Office, *Report to the Government of Singapore on a Proposed Social Security Scheme* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1959), pp. 3-4.
[79] *The Straits Times*, 9 December 1957, "Unionists and Politicians Welcome The Brocklehurst Report: Social Insurance Hailed".
[80] *Interim Report*, Annex C, pp. 56-57.
[81] *The Straits Times*, 12 April 1961, "TUC and Govt. Agree On Industrial Peace: Pact For Stability".

crisis after another, such as defeats in the by-elections for Hong Lim and Anson, and the Barisan Sosialis defections that almost toppled the government. The issue of unemployment insurance was apparently forgotten until March 1962, when David Marshall, then representing the Workers' Party in the Legislative Assembly, asked for the government's official position on the Caine and Brocklehurst reports.[82]

The debate over Marshall's question was heated. Goh Keng Swee and Lee Kuan Yew alleged the STUC's opposition to employee contributions undermined any hope of introducing unemployment insurance, let alone a more comprehensive social security scheme. S. T. Bani, a Barisan Sosialis assemblyman and a trade unionist, disagreed with the government's interpretation of events. He presented the other side of the story. Unemployment insurance contributions would be an additional burden to workers already contributing to the Central Provident Fund. Moreover, the dissolution of the STUC occurred at the same time that the Barisan Sosialis split from the People's Action Party, which meant the issue was not further discussed.[83] Lee was characteristically blunt. He suggested that it had always been the Barisan Sosialis' aim to keep the working class agitated, and as such, social security was a frivolous by-issue.[84] The irony is palpable even now. The STUC leaders who allegedly blocked the unemployment insurance scheme were at that time members of People's Action Party, revealing the deep fault-lines within the party that eventually led to the split in July 1961.[85]

After 1965, the government did consider unemployment insurance amidst fears of rising unemployment, which was exacerbated by the British military withdrawal announced in 1967. Yet another expert from the International Labor Organization was invited to Singapore in 1968 to provide expert advice.[86] This time around, the government was more decisive in abandoning plans for an unemployment insurance scheme to be financed by payroll taxes. Goh Keng Swee, in his second term as Finance Minister, observed that the scheme would be an additional burden on employers and employees already contributing increased rates to the Central Provident Fund and that the "best way to tackle unemployment

[82] *The Straits Times*, 30 November 1961, "Singapore Govt. To Call For Talks on Jobless Insurance".
[83] Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates, Official Report (Hansard) (15 March 1962), Vol. 17, Cols. 121-126, 132-164. See also *The Straits Times*, 16 March 1962. "First Things First – Lee: Social Security Scheme To Cover Unemployment, Old Age and Sickness Will Come Later, He Says".
[84] Hansard (15 March 1962), Vol. 17, Cols. 147, 161.
[85] The STUC representatives present at the talks were Lim Chin Siong, J. J. Puthucheary (who was also Chairman of the Central Provident Fund in 1960), Dominic Puthucheary, S. Woodhull, and S. T. Bani,
[86] Published by the ILO as *Report to the Government of Singapore on Social Security Planning and the Possible Introduction of an Unemployment Insurance Scheme* (Geneva, 1968). See also *The Straits Times*, 5 January 1968, "ILO Man Nears End Of Social Security Scheme Survey".

was by economic expansion".[87] Coming from someone who once argued for unemployment insurance, Goh's statement was the final nail in the coffin of any lingering intent to introduce British-style social security in Singapore.[88]

Colonial Continuities (and Their Assumptions) in Post-colonial Nation-building

Goh and his colleagues made good on his statement. Singapore's economy expanded rapidly, ensuring full employment figures and attaining developed society levels of per capita income by the 1970s. Basic social needs were not neglected either. The pace and scale of public housing development quickened, ensuring more than 80% of Singaporeans lived and owned an apartment by the mid-1980s. The Central Provident Fund was the primary survivor of Singapore's stop-start colonial-era quest for social security. The Fund's basic objective of providing for the individual's retirement was unchanged after 1965. But over time, its structures were altered to allow for the purchase of housing, to pay for medical treatment, and to finance children's education.

Similarly, the social welfare state described in this study was not fundamentally altered by political independence. At the time of sudden independence in 1965, the Social Welfare Department was nearing two decades of providing social services, ranging from financial assistance, institutional care and places of refuge to probation services for the young, old, and the vulnerable. The unprecedented official presence in social welfare was part of a broader policy to restructure Singapore from a colonial society that had developed along *laissez faire* principles, to a community ideally more cohesive that could then form the basis of a post-imperial nation. This was the objective of the new colonial policy devised during the Second World War, and implemented thereafter.

It was however easier said than done. The realization of the social welfare state was not a straightforward process of top-down implementation. More than century-old social structures and attitudes were not easily swept away. The idealistic enthusiasm of colonial planners moreover did not fully consider the implications of introducing social welfare that

[87] *The Straits Times*, 24 March 1970. "S'pore Scraps Jobless Insurance Scheme". Also see Hansard, 23 March 1970, Vol. 29, Cols. 865-867.

[88] In "Lee Kuan Yew's Fabian Phase", Michael Barr presents Goh's actions as a dissimulation. He cites an interview conducted by himself in 1996, where Goh said "we [referring to himself and Lee Kuan Yew] never believed in a welfare state". Barr also suggested that Goh "went through the motions" (to introduce unemployment insurance in 1960-1) so as to accommodate the "Communist-controlled Chinese trade unions". For a different take on Goh's position during the negotiations, see Ho Chi Tim, "Goh Keng Swee in a Social Welfare History of Singapore", pp. 61-62.

was led and coordinated by the government. Nonetheless, the ensuing complications, tensions, and outcomes created a social welfare state in late colonial Singapore. New institutions were created, some deliberately, such as the Social Welfare Department, the Social Studies diploma program, the Social Welfare Council and later the Singapore Council of Social Service, while others were less anticipated, such as the Family Planning Association or the Singapore Children's Society. Those institutions furthermore persisted well into the post-colonial era. The longevity of the social welfare state was due in no small part to a coherency imbued by the processes of effecting social welfare. More critically, the social welfare state was held together by the social bonds forged between individuals on one level, and between state and society on another. Those processes gave social welfare meaning within a society that had not experienced a deliberate and organized approach to social services. The social conditions of the immediate postwar period only made more urgent the central assumption that government should do more for the personal well-being of individuals.

Two broad points underpin the process of building the social welfare state and social security discussions in late colonial Singapore. First was how decolonization complicated both processes. The unanticipated manner in which Emergency Relief and the Family Planning Association came about, or even the ineffective nature of the Social Welfare Council, illustrates how policy implementation had to negotiate and resolve a maze of variables. Preceding chapters have demonstrated that some colonial officers were not always "bloodless bureaucratic administrators". McNeice and Cromwell for instance were invested, if not in Singapore, then at least in the jobs they were tasked to perform. Even then, while the social welfare state was originally a colonial enterprise, colonial officers were not its only or primary builders. Earlier chapters have shown that the burden and responsibility were shared, shouldered even more perhaps, by the ranks of local social welfare officers, professional social workers, scholars and academicians, volunteers and private citizens. The direction of the Social Welfare Department was set by colonial policy and led by British officers. But its work was executed by home superintendents, youth club leaders, case investigators, probation officers, and other social workers, the vast majority of whom were locals. The official presence in social welfare was further supported by almoners from the Medical Department, the faculty and students of the Social Studies diploma program, the work of religious bodies, charitable associations and voluntary organizations, and sometimes the initiative of individual volunteers. All of those gave coherency and meaning to the social

welfare state in late colonial Singapore. Although the classic welfare state did not materialize, the institutions, structures, and work processes that defined the social welfare state mostly survived British colonialism and political independence in 1965, and still exist in present-day Singapore in updated forms.

Singapore's abortive quest for a comprehensive social security scheme similarly illustrates the ambiguity of "colonial" during the late colonial period. The introduction of social welfare in postwar Singapore was originally a colonial policy, an enterprise that had global origins, and then designed and planned in the Colonial Office in London. Envisioned social security schemes were moreover inspired by those established in the metropole and elsewhere in the world, such as social insurance and a comprehensive healthcare system. But its implementation was far from smooth, shaped fundamentally by local-based forces and competing interests, all unfolding on a backdrop of constant social and political flux. After a while, policy was driven not so much by colonial officers, but its tone and direction dictated by aspiring local politicians who worked within the system and were informed by unanticipated circumstances. Recommendations for a pension scheme were discarded in favor of a provident fund, which originated from a local political party rather than the British. Later on, a comprehensive social security scheme centered on social insurance, and moreover replete with draft legislation and guidelines, was put on hold indefinitely by political uncertainty and internal strife within the People's Action Party. Both decisions were made by, assuming in this instance "colonial" refers simply to the British, "local" individuals and organizations. As the colonized looked forward to a post-colonial future, the British colonizer could and did not have it all their way after the Second World War. Decolonization moreover was not simply the withdrawal of the British from Singapore. It was more accurately a redefinition of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, or in other words, a historical process that attempt to redefine and restructure colonial societies into national communities.

This leads to the second, more general, point concerning the nature and impact of colonialism in Singapore. The fashioning of a social welfare state, and its continuity into the post-colonial period, layers existing perceptions of British colonialism as a backdrop to the Singapore Story or as a surveillance state buttressing a hierarchal presence. In the case of social welfare, there has been a fair amount of continuity from the colonial to post-colonial period. Hence, it is possible to suggest that late British colonialism gave a nation-building template for independent Singapore. Post-colonial Singapore did not fundamentally alter the

policies, institutions, processes and services, as well as their underlying assumptions, that emerged to support the social welfare state. The British were however far from simplistic introducers of modernity in Singapore. As this study has shown, the manner in which the social welfare state developed suggests a considerable amount of local, non-British agency.

This encourages a more nuanced approach to colonialism in Singapore. To reiterate, colonialism was not merely the duration of British presence on the island, or the mere instigator of significant historical moments. Colonialism also created deep lying social structures and attitudes that were sustained or altered by evolving relationships between the colonizer and colonized. Those in turn embedded particular approaches that persisted into the independence period in the case of social welfare. Chapter 1 highlighted several historical studies of Southeast Asia or of specific Southeast Asian countries that have engaged colonialism as a historical experience, and in doing so, acknowledging more clearly the colonial legacies that have persisted into the post-colonial era. This present study adds to that growing corpus of scholarship.

The "colonial" in colonial enterprise becomes less fixed, particularly during decolonization. This understanding of colonialism connects Singapore history more firmly to Southeast Asian history. Singapore is a geographical part of Southeast Asia, just as the histories of British Malaya and the Malay-speaking world (of which Singapore was and remains part of) are similarly integral parts of Southeast Asian history. Yet, with rare exceptions, historical research into Singapore's past is not immediately congruent with certain aspects of Southeast Asian historiography. One possible explanation for this disconnect is the inexorable focus on the Singapore Story (or to counter it), bestowing on otherwise good histories a narrow nation-state veneer. Such a perception is, on the surface at least, seemingly at odds with basic tenets of Southeast Asian historiography, such as the search for autonomous (Southeast Asian) perspectives and looking beyond nation-state boundaries and colonial-centric narratives. However, in recognizing the vagaries of terms like "colonial", the history presented in this study need not be seen solely as an externalist history of a colonial policy or as the pre-history of Singapore as a nation-state. These elements do of course exist in the pages above, but still, the histories presented in them also act as a conduit to understand the diversity of experiences that unfolded on the backdrop of colonialism.

The structural approach adopted in this study has illustrated how to reach those experiences, namely by asking broader questions of historical interactions, such as how did state and society respond to social needs at different points in time. Earlier chapters have

outlined how responses over time led to the emergence of a social welfare state during the late colonial period. In the midst of decolonization and nationalism, the social welfare state supported a nascent sense of community, and hence formed part of foundational structures that anticipated a supra-community identity anchored to Singapore.[89] Before 1965, the nature of that identity was unknown or in flux. It was unclear if Singapore would be part of Malaya, become a communist state, remain in Malaysia, or even remaining a territory within a rebranded British Empire. After Separation in 1965, people choosing to remain in Singapore had fewer choices when it came to a national identity, but they could at least leverage on the social welfare state and other nation-building structures that remained in place and functional.

Taking a structural approach to colonialism, that is to understand colonialism as a historical experience with the possibility of varied outcomes, then other issues in Singapore's social welfare history, and in Singapore history generally, stand out. The presence of a social welfare state is evidence of a fundamental break in British colonialism in Singapore. This was the result of a broader imperial policy, and hence, Singapore history expands beyond purely national (1965 and after) focal lens and is connected more firmly to imperial, regional, and global histories. The longevity of the social welfare state moreover explains to some extent the behavior and activities of the post-colonial state. The invasive state interventions of successive People's Action Party governments were not necessarily born solely out of post-Separation anxieties. They continued the approaches and their underlying assumptions first introduced by colonial nation-building efforts after the Second World War.

These perspectives provide a foundation from which we can look past political rhetoric and to also question presumptions that may inform scholarly observations, such as the idea that Singapore is anti-welfare. One could explain it as a difference in definitions, which is either social welfare as hand-outs, or social welfare as an approach to redefining the relationship between state and society. But the difference is significant enough that the former understates substantive histories of state-building, local agency, and social welfare. The latter approach on the other hand allows us to identify more clearly the structural changes in British colonialism in Singapore, the ensuing tensions from establishing a social

[89] In addition to social welfare and social policy, the idea of Singapore becoming a home was given a legal basis in 1957 via the introduction of Singapore citizenship by the Labour Front government. Though ultimately seeking to be one with a Malayan nation, the enfranchisement of another 250,000 aliens was another state structure that delineated a Singapore identity. See the second reading of the Singapore Citizenship Bill in the Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates, Official Report (Hansard-SLA), 11 September 1957, Vol. 4.

welfare state in the late colonial period, the continuities and traces that persist beyond the colonial period, and finally, the histories we are able to recover from those events.

From a firmer base of historical knowledge, we are better positioned to identify intriguing parallels. There is for instance a parallel between postwar colonial welfare and the Singapore government's recent shift towards welfare state-like measures, such as a universal health insurance scheme (Medishield Life), pension-like grants for the low-income elderly (Silver Support scheme), and a dedicated government ministry whose functions are the present-day successors of those introduced by the former Social Welfare Department. Both moreover have similar end-goals of creating more cohesive communities to support a particular vision of a nation; in other words, nation-building in its rawest sense.

Presenting the country's budget in 2015, Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, acknowledged the tilt in policy, and that "Government is playing a more active role in redistribution [of income]".[90] Government plays a major role in mitigating inequalities. In an adjustment of Lee Kuan Yew's "fair, not welfare" slogan, the primary objective of the policy tilt was to foster and sustain a "fair and inclusive" society. He explained the rationale for greater government interventions:

> What it boils down to is that we are providing more active support for Singaporeans at each stage of life: when you are young, when you are in your working years, as you raise your family, and when we all retire and get older. Very importantly, we are building a social compact that is not only about stronger collective responsibility, but which seeks to encourage personal and family responsibility. … That is at the heart of it.[91]

In keeping with the party line, the Minister pleaded a difference between his government's approach and the "cradle-to-grave welfarism" developed in the "advanced countries". Social expenditure by the Singapore government should not be seen as hand-outs, but rather as investments to help people own homes, have access to education and medical services, and ensuring support services during periods of unemployment, such as job retraining and income supplements.

Still, the essence of his remarks and the thrust of his economic and social policies are not all that different from postwar colonial policy. The historical contexts are different to be

[90] Singapore Parliamentary Debates (Hansard-SPR), 5 March 2015, Vol. 93. Debate on Annual Budget Statement. The Deputy Prime Minister typically dates the origins of this policy tilt to 2007 (the introduction of the Workfare scheme), partly to counter popular opinion that the policy changes began only after the People's Action Party suffered electoral setbacks in the 2011 General Election.
[91] Hansard-SPR, 5 March 2015, Vol. 93. Debate on Annual Budget Statement.

sure. Colonial policy then, ideally, was to rebrand the British Empire into a commonwealth of self-determining, equal partners. Present-day social policy seeks to address social inequalities and related concerns. But the concerns are similar, as the individual person's needs at various life stages do not fundamentally differ over time or geographical space. The approaches taken are also alike. Government was to play a leading role, a first in Singapore's colonial history, in repairing the fault-lines of the plural society, and to replace it with a version that could hopefully become a cohesive nation. The role of government moreover, as seen in the community development efforts of the Social Welfare Department, was to foster greater community participation and interaction as a basis for a national society. As part of the social welfare state, this central role of government continued well into the post-1965 period with few variations. Indeed, the same Deputy Prime Minister has recently and rather subtly interpreted the Singapore Story from a social and economic standpoint, as story of "broad-based social upliftment", deviating slightly from the typical trope of a heroic (political) struggle against the odds. In a speech given in Singapore's golden jubilee year, Tharman observed that:

> The story of Singapore's first 50 years that is best known internationally is of economic progress leading to a remarkable rise in GDP per capita. But that is not the heart of the Singapore story. The unique Singapore story has been that of broad-based social upliftment: jobs for all, rising incomes for all, homes for all, quality schools and public healthcare for all, and neighbourhoods and parks shared by all.[92]

The tone and rhetoric of the Deputy Prime Minister's speech was likely pitched for an audience of economists and related professions, but its essence posits intriguing parallels and continuities to the contemporary era, namely with the impetus for the imperial policy of welfare and development and the establishment of the social welfare state in late colonial Singapore. Postwar British colonial policy envisioned the colonies eventually becoming "self-supporting units", where "their citizens must enjoy a proper standard of social services, and we shall count as qualifying for assistance … every part of the health and medical activities and every part of the educational activities of a colonial Government".[93] In late

[92] Tharman Shanmugaratnam, "The Economic Society of Singapore SG50 Distinguished Lecture by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Tharman Shanmugaratnam", 14 August 2015. URL: http://www.mof.gov.sg/news-reader/articleid/1522/parentId/59/year/2015?category=Speeches. Accessed 24 November 2016. Tharman is currently the Second Deputy Prime Minister and the Coordinating Minister for Economic and Social Policies, and has an indirect connection to the social welfare state as a graduate of the London School of Economics and Political Science during the 1970s.

[93] HC Deb, 21 May 1940, vol. 361 cc46. (Cited in Chapter 1).

colonial Singapore, social welfare, in its broadest understanding, was the understated partner in this rudimentary nation-building process. The Singapore government has, since independence, similarly sought to build and support a new nation by investing heavily in housing, employment, healthcare, and education. In those efforts are echoes of colonial-era attempts to find ways to alleviate social contingencies individuals face at different stages of their lives. They also continue, perhaps subconsciously, postwar attempts to reorganize a colonial society into a national one. The significant increases in social expenditure in twenty-first century Singapore can be interpreted as the state's response to changing social needs and political pressures. Taking a broader viewpoint of Singapore society and history, they can be understood as one vision of what the Singapore nation should be, as an articulation of an ideal social compact of collective responsibility, in which individuals are responsible to and for each other. From a historical viewpoint, contemporary social policy has come full circle, ostensibly returning to the issues Singapore grappled with more than a half-century ago.

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